

SATURDAY

QUESTIONS OF SPORT

THE WORLD FOR TRAVEL

THE INDEPENDENT

No 2,882

13 JANUARY 1996 (TB 66p) 50p

I will not be pushed, says Major

DONALD MACINTYRE
Political Editor

John Major yesterday bluntly reasserted his belief in the very "One Nation" Toryism that Baroness Thatcher had derided in her controversial lecture and declared: "I will not be pushed off what I believe to be right."

In a determined effort to quell party anger in the aftermath of Lady Thatcher's highly right-wing critique of Tory "problems", the Prime Minister said: "We have been a One Nation Conservative Party since the beginning of time and we are now... how can one

possibly have a two-nation party of any sort?"

In a robust first public reaction to the lecture in which Lady Thatcher suggested that Conservatives had not lived up to middle-class expectations, Mr Major declared in his Huntingdon constituency that his administration had delivered a "platform of prosperity" and added: "I do not intend to be pushed off it."

As MPs on either side of the Tories' ideological fault-line queued up to defend or attack Lady Thatcher's Thursday lecture in a fresh outbreak of public squabbling, Mr Major refrained from direct personal

criticism of his predecessor. As a "very important part of the Conservative Party," she had "input" into party policy, the Prime Minister said.

But Lord Howe - her one-time ally, Chancellor, and Foreign Secretary - was withering about her remark that "One Nation" Tories were more like "No Nation" Tories because of their espousal of European "federalism". It had been a "glit phrase and an expensive one", he said. "I fear it is her latter-day obsession with that question [Europe] that risks doing so much damage to her own reputation and even in the last resort to the achievements

of the Government, in which we all worked together."

In contrast to the official Tory line, publicly advanced by Mr Major yesterday, that Lady Thatcher's lecture had been "misconstrued" and was essentially an attack on Labour, it was freely acknowledged in his circle that he had been dismayed by content regarded as "unhelpful".

John Prescott, Labour's deputy leader, said Mr Major was now "at war" with Lady Thatcher but the Prime Minister declared: "I have set out what I believe to be right and I shall fight for what I believe to be right and I will not be

pushed off what I believe to be right."

Ray Whitley, chairman of the party's Positive European Group, said Lady Thatcher's speech had been "sad" and that she looked "old and ill" on television, while Julian Critchley, the outgoing MP for Aldershot, suggested that "Lady Thatcher ought really to retire and open a tea shop in Bury St Edmunds."

Peter Lilley, the Secretary of State for Social Security, and one of the four right-wingers singled out for praise, said: "There are two interesting things about her speech - what she actually said and what you

in the media were determined to find in it. Five lines you've managed to blow up out of proportion. What's in the rest of it includes a very extensive, detailed and effective demolition job on Tony Blair and the Labour Party."

Yet even on the most generous count, Lady Thatcher's attack on Labour occupies no more than two of the nine closely typed pages in her lecture text - about half the length of a section entitled "Rethinking Conservative Policy" and about the same length as one headed "What Has Gone Wrong?"

Leading article, page 16

City bank in insider deals probe

DAVID HELLIER

The City was last night preparing itself for a big insider-dealing inquiry, focusing on a link between a public relations firm and employees at Robert Fleming, the investment bank. Department of Trade and Industry inspectors are next week widely expected to be called on to investigate.

The London Stock Exchange, whose surveillance department investigates allegations about the improper use of privileged information, has been listening to tape-recorded

to pass the information to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Yesterday a source close to the investigation said a decision had been delayed: "as more and more information comes up, but we are pretty well there now and there could be an announcement early next week."

Three employees at Robert Fleming spent time away from the office after the New Year break while the bank conducted its own internal inquiries. The stock exchange first investigated share dealings in Caradon last September after the building products firm was forced to bring forward its results and make a profits warning.

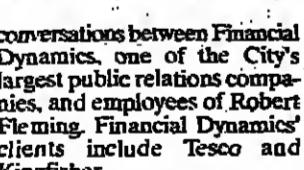
On the Friday before the results were due there was unusually high turnover in the shares, which fell sharply.

At the time stock market dealers expressed concern over the trades, saying that the volume of trade implied that some people were aware of Caradon's poor performance in advance of the publication of the company's figures.

The initial investigation appears to have lapsed. But in the past few weeks new information has been passed to the stock exchange, which forms the basis of its latest inquiries.

Financial Dynamics believes it is the victim of a smear campaign and rejected suggestions that anyone was contemplating resignation. Financial Dynamics was recently rebuked by the City Takeover Panel in an unrelated incident which involved passing on information about a client's future profits performance during the course of a contested takeover battle.

Some directors of Financial Dynamics are expected to receive hundreds of thousands of pounds in earn-outs shortly, while others are hoping to receive incentives with new share options.



Stock Exchange may be the centre of fresh controversy

conversations between Financial Dynamics, one of the City's largest public relations companies and employees of Robert Fleming. Financial Dynamics' clients include Tesco and Kingfisher.

The exchange is trying to ascertain whether anyone at Robert Fleming or any of its member firms made improper use of privileged financial information about the building company Caradon in September last year.

If they believe there is a prima facie case of wrongdoing, the usual procedure would be



East meets West: US soldiers greet the first Russian troops to serve with Nato in Bosnia as they arrive in Tuzla, Report, page 10

Photograph: AFP

DNA test for 1,200 lorry drivers

CHRIS MOWBRAY
and JASON BENNETTO

DNA testing is to be used nationally for the first time in an attempt to catch the murderer of the French student Celine Fagard, whom police revealed yesterday was probably raped before being strangled.

The naked body of Celine, 19, was found dumped in woodland in Worcestershire 10 days after she was given a lift by a lorry driver.

Police hunting her killer said yesterday that they intend to take DNA samples from all 1,200 drivers who own white Mercedes lorries similar to the one which Celine climbed into before she disappeared.

Some directors of Financial Dynamics are expected to receive hundreds of thousands of pounds in earn-outs shortly, while others are hoping to receive incentives with new share options.

bers of a particular trade. Large-scale screening in previous murder inquiries has only been done on a local basis.

In the most recent case up to 800 DNA samples, from mouth swabs, were taken from young men in the hunt for the killer of the schoolgirl Naomi Smith. The tests started in October from the village of Ansley Common, near Neaseaton, Warwickshire, where Naomi, 15, was found stabbed and sexually assaulted. In November, a 19-year-old man was charged with her murder.

The latest development in the Celine murder inquiry comes as police revealed that the student had been raped. Samples taken from her body have provided police with DNA, which they believe belongs to her killer. Forensic scientists plan to

compare this sample with those taken from the lorry drivers. Anyone refusing to co-operate will be further investigated.

Celine was last seen on 19 December being given a lift at Chevely Services on the M4 in Berkshire. The driver of the vehicle is described as a white man, in his late 30s and with fair or ginger hair and a close-cropped beard.

Detective Chief Superintendent John McCammon, the head of West Mercia CID, said: "The forensic evidence shows that she had sexual intercourse since travelling from France and I believe it took place without her consent."

"This sample will be of great value in eliminating drivers from our investigation. If we carry out DNA testing on all drivers of White Mercedes lorries, we should find the man responsible or discover that he has gone missing."

The new evidence will be welcomed by members of the haulage industry who are genuinely aghast and appalled.

The DNA from Celine's body will also be checked against the newly established national DNA database of "genetic fingerprints" to see whether it matches any samples taken from criminals or at the scene of other offences.

The database - the first in the world - was set up last April.

Since then police have been able to take samples from anyone being questioned in connection with a recorded crime. At first, only samples from a limited number of categories - sex offences, burglary and serious assault - are being recorded.

Sita would be glad to collect her water from a stand pipe



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Man seriously hurt as Volvo plunges 70ft from car park

PETER VICTOR

A driver crashed his Volvo through a barrier yesterday and plunged 70 feet off a multi-storey car park.

The man, believed to be in his sixties, was seriously ill in hospital last night after the drop from level four of the five-storey council-run building in Canterbury, Kent.

The maroon M-registered Volvo 440 automatic ploughed into a metal sprung barrier and then over the edge of the building, landing on its roof on concrete below. At first police feared the car had landed on top of another. But it ended up in an empty private car-parking

area. Its roof was completely caved in and the windows were shattered. The driver was helped out by firemen and taken to the Kent and Canterbury hospital where his condition was said to be serious.

The car landed in the road opposite the Canterbury branch of British Home Stores. The assistant manager, Suzanne Heron, said staff and customers heard a "very large bang". She said: "Nobody saw it actually fall, but everyone heard it. Members of the public ran to help and we called the emergency services."

An eyewitness, Julian Hicks, 21, a student from the city, said: "I just heard what seemed like

the noise made when scaffolding is unloaded off a lorry, but I looked out and couldn't believe I was seeing the car falling. It seemed to take forever to reach the ground, but then there was the most almighty crash which reverberated on and on."

Lucy Bright, 32, a shopper who also lives locally said: "People were running to Rose Lane where the car ended up on its back. But the emergency services were there fairly quickly and cordoned the scene off."

Canterbury city council said it had launched an inquiry into the crash at the car park which sits on an island in the centre of the city. A spokeswoman con-

firmed that the multi-storey car park, which is built from reinforced concrete, was constructed in 1963.

The accident mirrors a Volvo car advertisement where one of its cars plunges from a building and lands without harming the vehicle or its dummy occupant.

Kent police said the incident was being treated as an accident. A police spokesman said: "We do not know what happened."

"It appears, somehow, that the car went over the edge and landed on its roof on the floor below. Miraculously the driver survived the crash and has been taken to hospital. Amazingly, no one else was hurt."



Police inspecting the car in Rose Lane after its 70ft plunge from the car park (right) Photographs: Phil Houghton

Ecstasy's dangers: Coma survivor vows never again as mother urges young to 'say no'

Teenager warns of 'dance with death' drug

IAN MACKINNON

A teenager who spent 24 hours in a coma after taking ecstasy yesterday appealed to young people not to take the drug which she likened to a "dance with death".

Helen Cousins, 19, appeared at a news conference minutes before going for a second operation to rectify the tracheotomy which became necessary after she suffered a relapse during her recovery.

Barely able to speak above a whisper because of the tube still in her throat, the sales assistant from Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, was asked if she would ever take ecstasy again and replied: "Never again."

Miss Cousins fell into the coma in the early hours of New Year's Day minutes after she was taken to Peterborough district hospital.

She had taken the drug at a nightclub on New Year's Eve, but had been taken to a flat shortly after 1am when friends noticed that she was not feeling well.

When her condition continued to deteriorate, her friends called an ambulance and she was taken to the hospital's intensive care unit where she remained for two days.

Doctors believe that her coma had been induced by the seven litres of water she drank in a desperate bid to combat the effects of the drug, which can cause dehydration among those who dance for long periods.

The drug also interferes with

the abilities of the kidneys to get rid of the water and can bring on a coma.

Yesterday, at the Edith Cavell Hospital, Peterborough, Miss Cousins appeared at the conference flanked by her mother, Janet, 51, and father, Trevor, 47.

Simon Harrison, the hospital's surgical and life support general manager, said that her recovery had been so dramatic that she would probably be released from hospital today after the operation to remove the tracheotomy tube.

Mrs Cousins thanked the doctors for their skill and the public for their support, including Paul and Janet Beets, whose daughter Leah died after taking ecstasy last November.

But Mrs Cousins added her own appeal. "I'm pleading to all young people, don't chance your life, it can happen to you. If you take ecstasy it can take your life. Nothing is worth that. Don't weaken, be strong and say, 'no'."

"Helen would like to say that it is when problems like this hit home you realise ecstasy isn't worth the dance with death."

Detectives in Stafford yesterday unveiled a haul of lethal fake ecstasy tablets worth £1.5m. The 100,000 tablets were found to contain the stimulant ephedrine and the anaesthetic ketamine. A similar batch of tablets, imprinted with a question mark, were found in Birmingham on Tuesday. Police warned the drugs could kill.

The drug also interferes with



Helen Cousins: Spent 24 hours in a coma after taking ecstasy. Photograph: Geoff Robinson

Fears for Britons as troops comb jungle

WILL BENNETT

Indonesia yesterday moved hundreds of commandos into the area where four British biologists have been kidnapped by separatist rebels as fears rose that any military confrontation could put the captives' lives at risk.

Troops from the Indonesian army's special forces arrived in the Irian Jaya region of New Guinea to try to stop the guerrillas of the Free Papua Movement (OPM), which is fighting for independence, from taking their prisoners into neighbouring Papua New Guinea.

The four Britons, a Dutch couple, a German and 17 Indonesians were seized in the mountain village of Mapenduan on Monday. They had been working on research projects in a remote jungle area which is home to one of the world's last Stone Age cultures.

The Cambridge graduates Daniel Start, 21, from London; Bill Gates, 22, from Edinburgh in the Scottish borders; Anna McIvor, 21, from Bournemouth, and Annette van der Kolk, 21, from Fleet, in Hampshire, were researching plant and animal life as part of a programme to turn the area into a protected national forest.

Brigadier General Suwarno briefing for the hostages' families in London yesterday said he believed that there was little chance that the rebels would get through the thick jungle to the border, 240 miles from where they captured the hostages.

Greg Roberts, an Australian journalist in New Guinea, said yesterday that the OPM had announced that the hostages were well but that they could not guarantee their safety if Indonesian troops moved in.

"Until recently non-combatants were left alone by the OPM but two recent kidnappings and apparent killings of Indonesians do tend to indicate a major change in direction by the OPM," he said.

But David Marfleet, of the Mission Aviation Fellowship, who spent nine years as a pilot supplying mission stations in Irian Jaya, said he did not believe the Britons were in danger. He added: "My feeling is that [the OPM] are trying to make an international statement to get publicity for their cause."

A Foreign Office spokesman said that two British diplomats had flown to Irian Jaya, where they had spoken to missionaries and local officials. From there one had travelled to the area where the hostages were seized to try to get more information. After a Foreign Office

briefing for the hostages' families in London yesterday Caroline Miller, Mr Start's mother, said: "They earnestly wanted to help the local people through their conservation project. This was always their purpose. They are completely innocent. We wish to see them again soon, safe and well. We are very concerned for their welfare."

■ Indian police in the southern city of Bangalore are still hunting for the killer of a 30-year-old British traveller who was stabbed to death on Tuesday. Police said the victim's 25-year-old British fiancée was also raped that same evening by a rickshaw driver.

The city's deputy police commissioner, Prabir Sood, said that the body of the man, who came from Oxfordshire, was found on Wednesday in a sack thrown into a ditch outside the city. "It was a strange and unfortunate coincidence. There seems to be absolutely no connection between these two terrible events," he said.

However, a spokesman for the British High Commission in New Delhi, said: "We're still awaiting the full police report. Coincidences do happen. But the odds against these two things occurring without connection are very high."

Trespass law used against road protest

DANNY PENMAN

The Criminal Justice Act was used against campaigners opposing the Newbury bypass yesterday after calls for the police to take a harder line. More than 30 people were arrested, mostly for aggravated trespass, during

clashes between protesters and security guards.

The Aggravated Trespass Provisions of the contentious 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act have rarely been used against anti-road campaigners for fear of inflaming already volatile situations.

Thames Valley and Hampshire police have faced mounting criticism of their tactics. Assistant Chief Constable Ian Blair of Thames Valley Police, who is in overall charge of Newbury, David Rendel, for the police to help security guards.

Contractors began felling trees at the southern end of the bypass route at dawn yesterday

and cleared about 30 trees before protesters swarmed up the trees. Sixteen people were arrested. Three miles to the north another crew began clearing trees from a disused railway cutting. Protesters climbed trees and began erecting walkways and 18 others were arrested.

Son's gold strike has a ring of fortune

JOHN ARLIDGE

A grandmother celebrated yesterday after her son found her gold signet ring more than 20 years after she lost it.

Doreen Johnston, a retired nurse, lost the ring when it slipped from her finger as she played with her sons and the family's dog in a park in Stratford, Dumfries and Galloway, in 1974. Family members visited the park every day for a week to search for it but gave up when they found nothing.

This year Mrs Johnston's son Robert, 26, began work on a project redeveloping Agnew Park as a tourist attraction. As he dug over the ground earlier this week he spotted something glittering in the mud.

The ring bore Mrs Johnston's initials and after an inspection he realised it must be his mother's. "I really was astonished... it was against all odds. I'd had a better chance of winning the lottery," said Mrs Johnston, 55. "The ring was a gift from my grandfather... I had completely given up hope of finding it."

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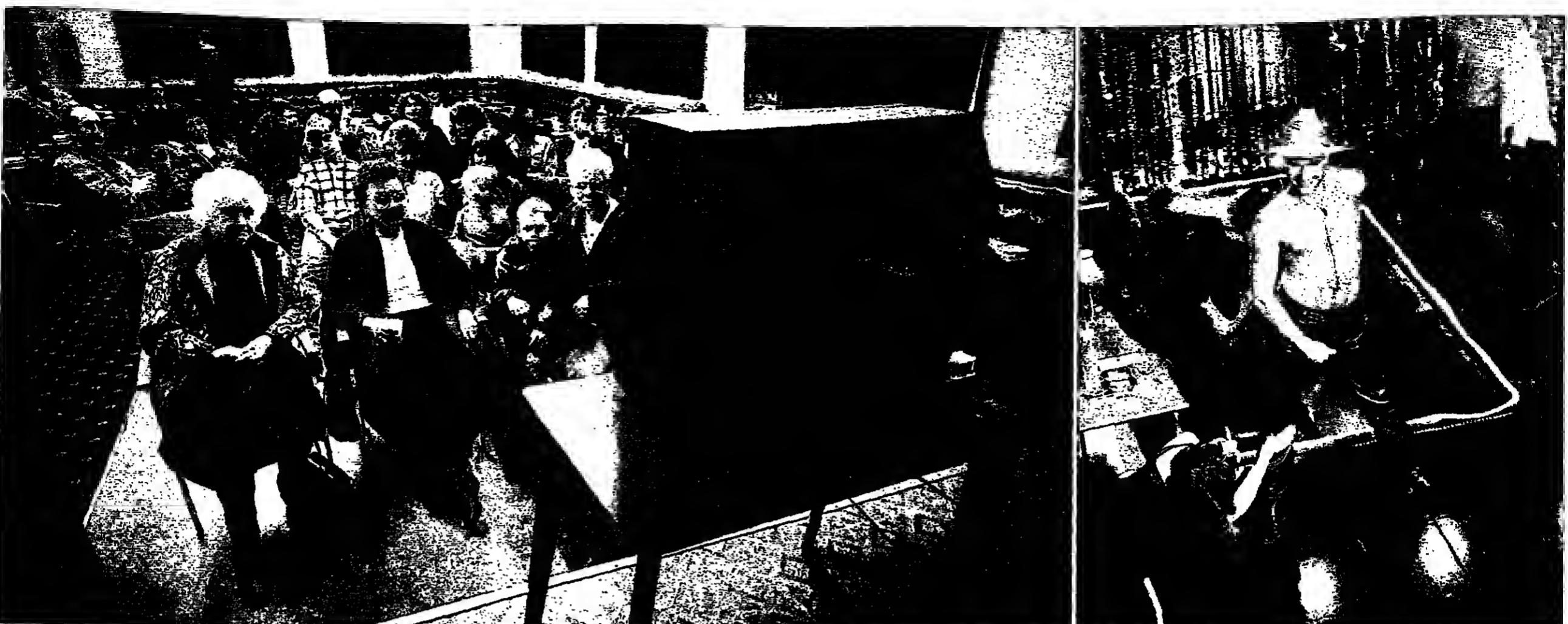
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Ex-miners bare all to strike a handsome seam



Naked ambition: Members of Gin Pit miners' welfare club enjoying *The Bare Necessities*, about ex-miners who form a stripper troupe (right), just as Rhydian Lewis (below left) did seven years ago

Main photograph: Craig Easton



LOUISE JURY

The writer Ken Blakeson did not know it, but the plot for his latest comedy-drama was not as outrageous as it seemed.

In *The Bare Necessities*, to be screened on ITV tonight, five gritty northern miners find new careers as strippers when their pit closes down.

Upoorous scenes with screaming women relishing the troupe's finest efforts were filmed in the Astley and Tyldes-

ley miners' welfare club in Gin Pit village, near Manchester.

It was quite a coincidence. For seven years ago, Rhydian Lewis was a good-looking local lad who had the idea first.

The son and grandson of miners, Rhydian left school at 16 and went down Agecroft colliery at Salford, Manchester. Faced with redundancy after only two years at work, he decided to re-train but found it difficult to survive on a grant.

A chance visit with a friend

to a night club proved an inspiration. "There were these guys called the Dream Boys strutting their stuff," Rhydian said yesterday. "I'd never seen anything like it. I said to my friend, 'We can do that!'"

The Untouchables, a five-man strippers troupe, were born. "We weren't really like the lads in the film. We weren't strippers, more like the Chipendales," Rhydian said.

Their risqué dance routines helped pay his way through col-

lege where he gained a diploma in horticulture. But his two and a half years on the stage gained him an Equity card, an agent and a new career on television and as a model.

He now earns in an hour what he used to earn in a week, and has travelled the world.

It was his coalface colleagues had always encouraged him to do. "They were always telling me to get out and go into modelling," he said.

"Handsome" was how the

men and women at the Gin Pit club remembered him yesterday. "As fit as a butcher's dog," said Margaret Weir, a bar maid.

Settling down to a sneak preview of the drama, the club members agreed with Rhydian that it captured something of a way of life that is disappearing.

"It brought a lot of memories back about what pit villages used to be like," said Joe Gorringe, 50, a club trustee and miner for 26 years. "Lots of fun and laughter and tragedy."

Kevin Harris, a 33-year-old pipe fitter, added: "You could get five lads in here deaf enough to do it, certainly."

Dorothy Sharratt, 68, whose home was turned over to the television crews for a week, thought the result "smashing". If they had done that here when people were being made redundant, they would have done better, wouldn't they?

There are no pits left in the area now. The last of the five collieries closed in 1993. The wel-

fare club, founded in 1926, the year of the General Strike, once had 15,000 members but now has fewer than 1,000, though it remains the soul of the community.

Rhydian, now 27 and living in London, hated every moment of his work down the pit but was grateful for having grown up in such a community.

"I'm very glad to have been a miner. I still have nightmares about the pit but I appreciate what I have now more," he said. "I know what graft is."

Injured officer questions safety of CS spray

JASON BENNETTO
Crime Correspondent

A police training instructor who suffered 50 per cent burns from CS spray during trials has warned that it is not properly tested and could cause severe injuries to the public.

The comments by the Metropolitan Police inspector provides further ammunition for civil liberty groups who argue that not enough is known about the spray, which they believe could lead to deaths.

However, Chief Constables seem determined to press ahead with trials on the spray, which are expected to start among 2,500 officers from 18 forces as early as March. The move is a response to the increasing violent attacks against the police.

The injured inspector, who does not want to be named, told *Police Review* magazine: "It's obvious there's something wrong with the spray being trialled. I was subjected to a relatively small dose – less than would be used against a suspect in a real-life scenario.

"If I got burns to my eyes and head from that amount, what could be the implications for

people who get more full in the face with their eyes open?"

During trials last June the officer was sprayed under controlled conditions for half a second – the recommended dose. He suffered 50 per cent burns to the cornea of one eye, 40 per cent to the other and burns to his forehead. He was taken to hospital after he collapsed and was in severe pain for several hours. His eyes were covered with patches for five days to allow the burns to heal.

He argued: "Whenever this issue comes up people say I suffered an allergic reaction. Well that's just not true – I was burnt. Since the incident I have not been contacted for an examination to see if I am someone who is more or less susceptible to this sort of reaction. That is pitiful and unprofessional. There is nothing in my physical make-up to make me prone to this."

He said the Association of Chief Police Officers (Acpo) "rushed" to get the trials started and added: "The spray used on me was clearly not suitable." It is unclear whether he intends to take legal action, although he is keen that further

research is carried out so that colleagues can be provided with the hand-held canisters, which have a range of about 3ft.

Following his experience, planned trials in 18 forces were halted; however, further police research has concluded that incorrect aftercare was primarily at fault rather than the CS itself. Acpo is therefore almost certain to give the go-ahead to new trials in more than one-third of the forces in England and Wales when it meets next week. The Home Office has already given its support.

CS is a white powder that is mixed with aerosol spray and affects the mucus-secreting areas of the face, causing watering eyes, sneezing, and coughing.

The police inspector also suggested that because of the long after-effects of the spray a suspect could not be questioned for some time once they were arrested. "I suffered shock, and it would have been a nightmare for our procedures if a prisoner was suffering to the extent I was. I am concerned that officers should have the proper equipment to protect themselves. But it must be thoroughly researched," he said.

Bed crisis could split NHS, Labour says

LIZ HUNT
Health Editor

Labour stepped up pressure on the Government yesterday to act on emergency hospital admissions, claiming that the crisis would split the NHS.

Harriet Harman, Labour's spokeswoman on health, said that more than one in six NHS acute beds had been cut since 1990 and that 7,664 beds were cut in England last year alone.

In the past 15 years the number of NHS acute hospital beds had fallen by 28 per cent, while private beds had increased by 66 per cent, Ms Harman said. The worst-hit areas were South Thames and West Midlands, where one in five beds had been cut since 1990.

The British Medical Association had earlier called on the Government to rectify the "severe and prolonged bed crisis in

the acute sector". The association has anecdotal evidence from around Britain showing that GPs cannot get seriously ill patients into hospital, while casualty departments – which are suffering severe staff shortages – are running at capacity.

Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, has admitted in the Commons that the situation was a "matter for concern".

Ms Harman said: "The circumstances the BMA described will drive a further wedge of unfairness into the health service and accelerate the development of a two-tier system."

She warned that unless prompt action was taken hospitals would start opening their doors only to emergency cases and the patients of GP fund-holders who could pay up front for care. At the same time, more patients would go private.

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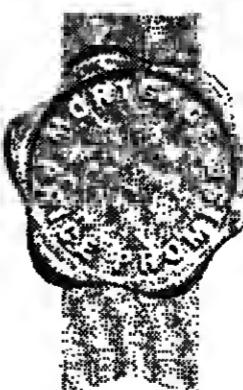
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John Latimer



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J. H. H. 1986

news

Art forger's death in Rome a mystery

ANDREW GUMBEL
Rome

Eric Hebborn, the English art forger whose work made fools out of dozens of eminent experts and world-ranking galleries in the Sixties and Seventies, became the centre of a sensation of rather different kind yesterday as Italian police launched an investigation into his mysterious death earlier this week from a brain haemorrhage.

Hebborn, who was 61, was found lying on the ground with fractured skull in the early hours of Wednesday morning, following an evening spent drinking with friends near his home in the Trastevere district of central Rome. Despite attempts by doctors to resuscitate him at a number of hospitals, he was reported to have eventual-

ly died from internal bleeding on Thursday morning.

The police said yesterday that they were not sure if Hebborn had fallen by himself or had been attacked. They were waiting for the results of a post-mortem examination to decide whether to open a murder inquiry.

Hebborn had lived in Italy for more than 30 years, dividing his time between a loft in Tras-

vere and a well-appointed country house in Anticoli Corrado not far from Rome. Having trained as a painter and art restorer, his speciality was either copying or emulating such greats as Piranesi, Picasso, Gainsborough and Van Dyck.

So accomplished did he become that hundreds of his works made their way into public galleries and private collections as supposed Old Masters,

often fooling world experts on particular painters along the way. He claimed his work had made it into the British Museum in London, the New York Metropolitan Museum and the National Gallery in Washington.

Even after he was unmasked in 1979, Hebborn continued to work lucratively, and also wrote an autobiography, *Drawn to Trouble: Confessions of a Master Forger* along the way.

"Sometimes his work was more beautiful than the original," said Roberto Conforti, head of the Italian police division responsible for the country's artistic heritage and an unabashed fan. "He never gave us any trouble. He used to say: 'Others paint nature, I paint art'."

Instantly recognisable in the street, with his shaggy dark hair and full beard, Hebborn, a

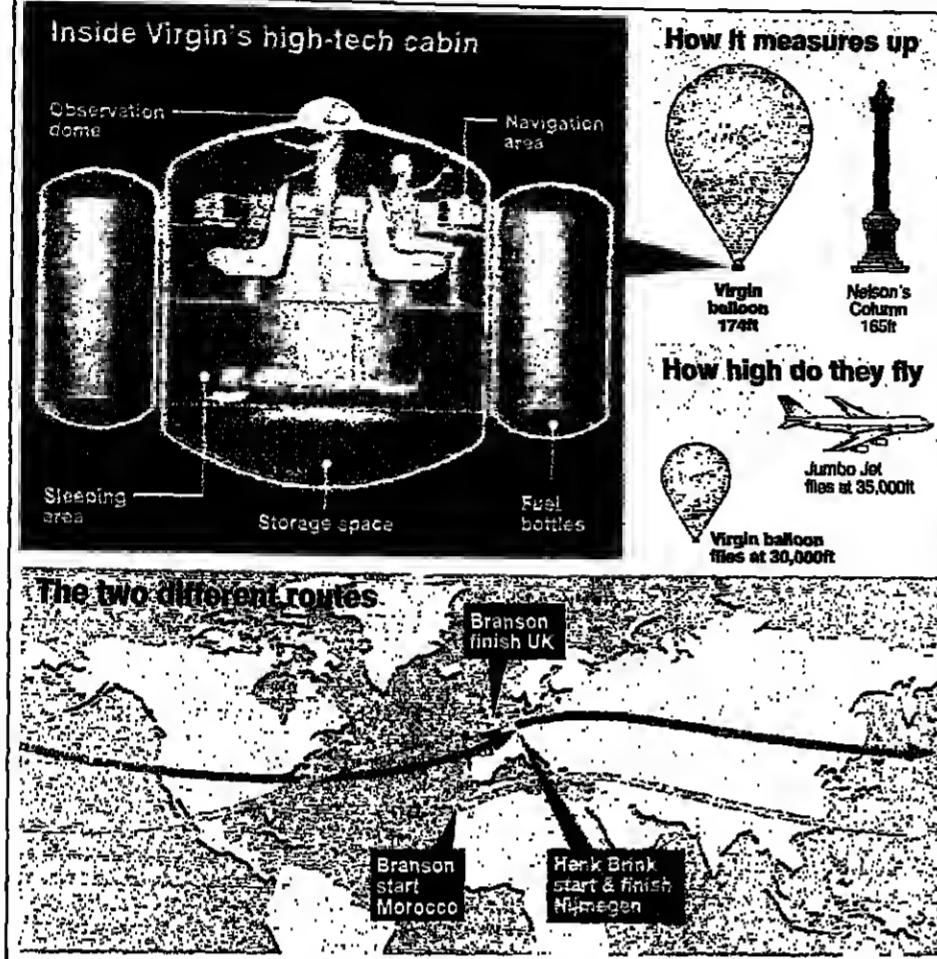
homosexual, was also an unabashed hedonist with a taste for good food and good Italian wine.

Hebborn did not appear to have been mugged since his wallet and credit cards were still on him when he was taken to hospital. One possibility is that he had suffered a stroke. He was known to be in indifferent health at the time of his death.

Obituary, page 14



Branson sets sights on breaking last great aviation record



JOHN MCKIE

Richard Branson, the Virgin chief, is this weekend finalising his preparations for a race to claim the accolade of being the first to circumnavigate the globe in 18 days.

McCarthy, will set off from Marrakesh, Morocco, in a round-the-world attempt to break the last great aviation record.

In the *Virgin Global Challenger* balloon, they plan to circumnavigate the globe in 18 days.

Both balloons will be fully heated and pressurised allowing access to the 100mph jet streams required to travel.

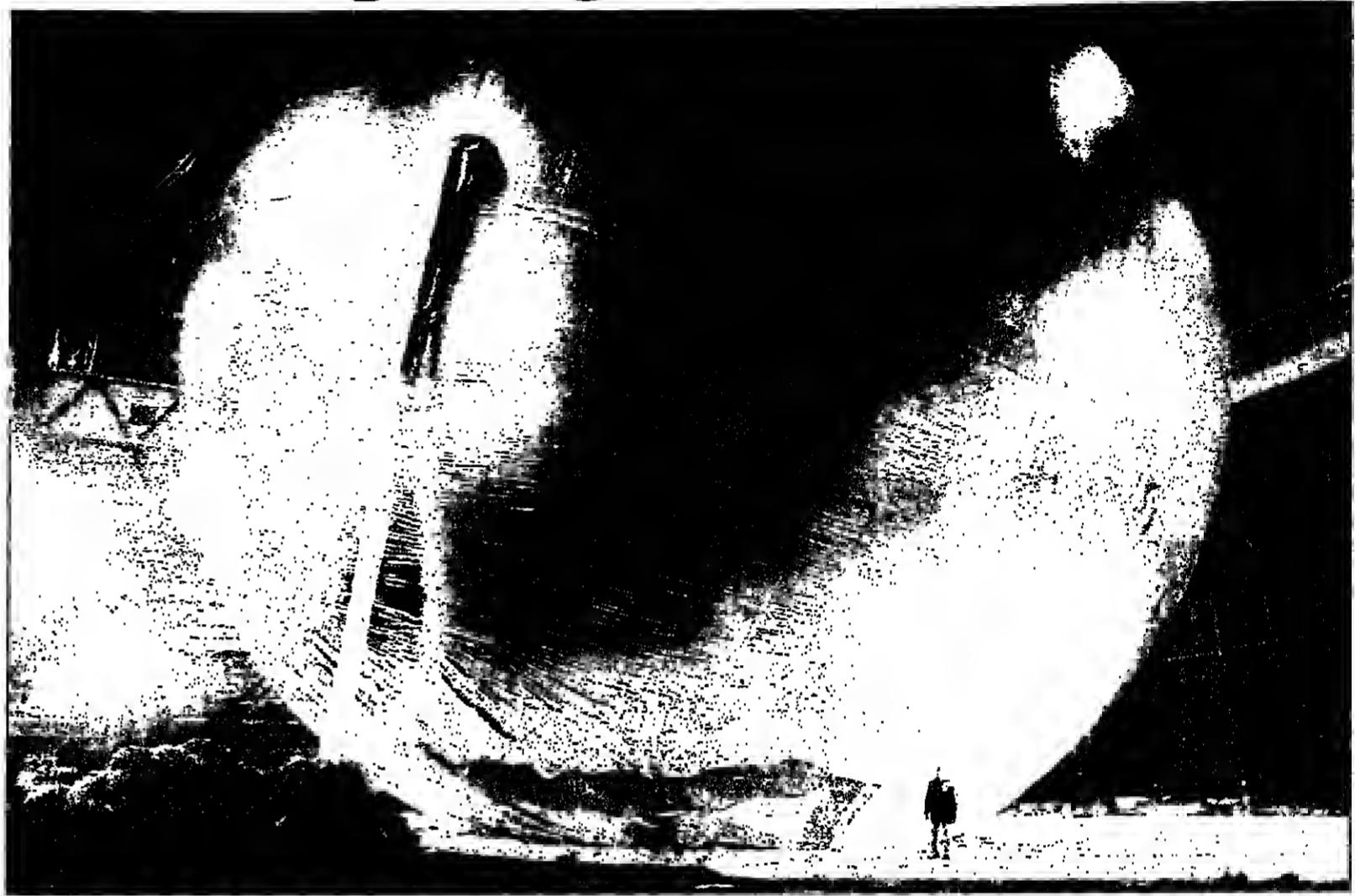
The two balloons have both been designed by Mr Branson's co-pilot Per Lindstrand.

Mr Branson is leaving from the Dutch town of Nijmegen, some time next week, he hopes. A spokesman said: "It is very likely we will have the right conditions next week. Henk will do his utmost to get away first."

But Henk Brink, 52, may beat them to it. The Dutchman is planning a global flight in the high-tech *Unicef Flyer* balloon in an attempt described as "very serious" by the Branson camp.

Both he and Mr Branson have done their homework.

Both balloons will be fully heated and pressurised allowing access to the 100mph jet streams required to travel.



Testing time: The Virgin balloon undergoing trials at the Cammell Laird shipyard before Richard Branson's record attempt. Photograph: Mercury Press Agency

Mr Branson's spokesman, Will Whitehorn, said he initiated the flight after the challenge was laid down by Mr Brink. "Richard's very much hoping it will be a race," he said.

Mr Whitehorn added that the *Challenger* stood to win the race because of the calmer

ground conditions in Marrakesh, and a strong jet stream of 30,000 feet. The 174ft balloon has a unique balloon envelope combined from nylon and Melinex—the silver metallised plastic found on the inside of some crisp packets. Melinex helps to keep the balloon warm

at night and cool during the day.

The *Challenger* will be carried only by the winds 30,000 feet up.

The 35-tonne balloon was being flown yesterday from Cammell Laird shipyard on Merseyside to Morocco in preparation for Wednesday's departure.

Mr Branson has also enlisted heavyweight back-up for the venture. British Aerospace has lent him a transport aircraft in case of emergencies and Rolls-Royce engineers in Derby successfully tested the engine for the balloon's life-support system in November.

Whatever the outcome, neither camp has to worry about an American rival, Steve Fossett, who set off from South Dakota on Monday only to limp back to Canada after crash-landing over the Atlantic, 100 miles into the journey. But for Mr Branson, Mr Brink represents a more serious threat.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL RICHARDSON

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news

Battle to hold show fit for the millennium



Field of dreams: Development of the Greenwich site would have to start from scratch

Photograph: Philip Meech

REBECCA FOWLER

The winner of the fierce competition to host the Millennium Exhibition, an attempt to celebrate the year 2000 with a grand project worthy of the Victorians, will be chosen next week.

The front-runners have emerged as Greenwich and Birmingham in a battle between London and the regions. They are locked in rivalry for the contract for the year-long event, which could cost up to £200m and will be partly supported by lottery money from the Millennium Commission.

As Britain celebrates the dawn of the new millennium, the exhibition is expected to attract up to 50 million visitors. So far it has emerged as the most ambitious in the world, with the exception of that put forward by the Vatican City, to celebrate the first 2,000 years of Christianity.

The bidders hope to confound critics of the project, who claim it will be an embarrassing shadow of the Great Exhibition of 1851, at Crystal Palace, where the Victorians flaunted the nation's imperial wealth. David Mellor, the former Secretary of State for National Heritage, said from the outset that the Millennium



Existing facilities would be used if the NEC bid succeeds

Photograph: Russell Sack

Commission was a "great British disaster in the making."

According to supporters of the bid from Greenwich - which is sited on the Meridian - the capital city is the natural home for the celebrations. "The historical resonance of the 1851 exhibition and the Festival of Britain in 1951, which both happened in London, are very

strong, and it is still one of the world's great cities," said Andrew Parry, project manager for the site.

A powerful consortium, including the MAI Group, led by Lord Hollick, which is part of the successful Channel Five television franchise bid, and M2000, headed by Touche Ross, the management consultancy, is bidding to operate the Greenwich site on the River Thames, in a derelict area beside the Blackwall Tunnel. It is also understood to have the support of Michael Heseltine, a supporter of the redevelopment of east London, who also sits on the Millennium Commission.

The 130-acre site, owned by British Gas, would create 10,000 jobs, according to the backers, and would bring the Thames back to life. They plan to transport visitors by river, as well as by road and rail.

The exhibition bids were submitted to the Millennium Commission last summer. Headed by Virginia Bottomley, the Heritage Secretary, the commission

will meet this week to make a decision.

Birmingham has the support of lottery critics, who say too much money has gone to the capital. A London-based design company, Imaginative, proposes to operate the 40-acre site around the existing National Exhibition Centre, and has secured a pledge of £250m investment from the local authority.

The plan incorporates new buildings and parking facilities for more than 50,000 cars. It would divide the site into different zones, for exhibitions, entertainment and ecology. "As the only site with the proven expertise, existing infrastructure, capability and commitment to stage an event worthy of the millennium, we are ready and waiting," said the NEC chairman, Robert Burman.

The commission has invited operators to make their plans transferable to other sites if necessary. Derby's Pride Park and Stratford, in east London - which have also submitted bids - have not been ruled out.

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JY Womack

international

Primakov soothes West but looks east

HELEN WOMACK
Moscow

Russia's new Foreign Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, yesterday gave a finely-balanced performance at his first meeting with the press since President Boris Yeltsin appointed him to replace Andrei Kozyrev.

Russia was a "great power" and he would make it his priority to serve its interests, he said in comments likely to warm the hearts of Communists and nationalists who criticised Mr Kozyrev for being too compliant towards the West. But Mr Primakov went on to say that friendly ties with the West need not suffer because of this and certainly there would be no return to Cold War hostility.

"We are a great power and our policy must reflect our status," Mr Primakov told the packed press conference. "I consider it my main task to step up the Foreign Ministry's work in defending Russia's national interests. But I don't think that will contradict the development of ties with the United States."

While continuing to co-operate with the West, Russia would pay attention to relations with important neighbours to the East, such as China and Japan, and with traditional partners in the Middle East, which have lapsed somewhat since the collapse of Communism.

Moscow also needed to strengthen ties with the "near abroad", the now-independent republics of the former Soviet Union, he said.

Russia would oppose the eastward expansion of Nato, he said - Moscow has already made it clear it does not want to see former Warsaw Pact states such as Poland and Hungary joining the Western alliance. But there would be no return to the Cold War, Mr Primakov assured the West.

Earlier this week, when introducing his new man to the Foreign Ministry, President Yeltsin said the West should concern itself not with the personalities of Russian politicians but with the country's policies - and there would be no change in Moscow's foreign policy.

Mr Primakov's comments

confirmed there was no U-turn now. The change towards a more assertive stance a month ago when Mr Kozyrev was still in office, initially friendly to the West, Mr Kozyrev was using more nationalistic rhetoric towards the end of his term.

The appointment of Mr Primakov, 66, was politely welcomed in Washington but privately US diplomats expressed concern, saying he was conservative. Such labels are, however, misleading in today's Russia and whether Mr Primakov will turn out to be more conservative than Mr Kozyrev remains to be seen. In any case, it is President Yeltsin who sets the country's foreign policy.



Primakov: Main task is defend Russia's interests

cy. The Foreign Minister only carries it out.

US worries about Mr Primakov, formerly a journalist on the old Communist Party newspaper *Pravda*, were partly based on the fact that his last job was as head Russia's foreign intelligence service. But Mr Primakov was not a life-long secret policeman. He was made spy chief when the old KGB split up after the failed hard-line coup of 1991, and at the time eyebrows were raised because he had no KGB background.

American diplomats also remembered that Mr Primakov had been "unhelpful" to Washington's interests when, as a troubleshooter for the former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, he made a last-ditch attempt to negotiate with Saddam Hussein and prevent the Gulf war.

Siege mentality: Russian troops manoeuvring a cannon into position outside the village of Pervomayskoye where Chechen rebels are still holding out

Photograph: AFP

Chechen rebels free 8 hostages

PHIL REEVES
Pervomayskoye

The stand-off between Russian forces and a band of Chechen rebels holed up in a border village in Dagestan eased last night with claims by the authorities that the besieged separatists had released eight hostages.

It marked the first breakthrough in the three-day deadlock in which the Chechens and more than 100 of their captives have been surrounded in the village of Pervomayskoye by tanks and heavy artillery of the Russian army.

The rebels had said earlier they were prepared to release 30 women and children in exchange for being guaranteed safe passage into Chechnya. However, it was unclear how many women and children were

among the hostages: the Itar-Tass news agency put the number at 26 yesterday before any were released.

The rebels were also said to have offered to release all their hostages on condition that they are accompanied on their journey back to Chechnya by a handful of notable Russian politicians - including Grigory Yavlinsky and General Alexander Lebed, both presidential candidates, and the reformer Yegor Gaidar. Mr Yavlinsky and Mr Gaidar apparently agreed but not Gen Lebed.

This glimmer of hope - albeit faint - concluded another day of tension in this remote patch of southern Russia, where many are fuming over the Chechens' decision to cross the border of their breakaway republic, enter the Dagestan town of Kizlyar on Tuesday, and corral 2,000

hostages inside a hospital. Yesterday Russian helicopter gunships continued to swoop menacingly over the Chechens and their remaining captives - who include 37 Ministry of Interior policemen - as the Russian Army manoeuvred its tanks and heavy guns around the dead flat, frozen landscape.

The Russians have tightened security around the besieged village after several correspondents, including the *Independent*, walked in on Thursday and interviewed Salman Raduyev, the rebels' leader.

In Kizlyar, the nearest village, an armoured vehicle blocked the road leading to the rebels' stronghold, much to the irritation of about 100 Dagestan men who had assembled at the edge of this potential battleground both out of curiosity and to rail against the rebels.

They were quick to point out that they have played host to tens of thousands of Chechen refugees who have fled from their homeland to this impoverished Russian republic over the last year to escape Chechnya's nasty little war. That Chechens should now be holding their Islamic neighbours hostage is seen here as tantamount to treason.

At the tiny farming village's edge hangs a Soviet-era sign bearing a picture of Lenin. The motif says: "Dearest of all to us is the preservation of peace". If the local people, the Avars, ever believed this sentiment - and in the troubled Caucasus that seems unlikely - then their faith has now been shattered.

Yesterday the women and children of Sovietskoye were evacuated on the orders of local elders who feared they could

be caught in stray fire from Chechen rebels or Russian guns. They were despatched to stay with relatives, leaving their men to wander bewildered among the cattle, geese and chickens who rule the muddy lanes. From time to time, deep groans rumble across the landscape - evidence that the Russians have yet to fire of bombing Chechens over the nearby border.

Nor are the Avars the only ones among Dagestan's jumble of peoples to be damaged by this crisis. Chechens living in Dagestan have condemned the hostage-taking as an act of terrorism. They held a meeting in Khasavyurt, a town 10 miles from the scene of the crisis, and decided to dispatch two busloads of Chechen men and women as volunteers to replace the hostages.

In Moscow, Sergei Medvedev, the spokesman for President Boris Yeltsin, said the Kremlin leader was being fully briefed. "Yeltsin receives hourly reports," Mr Medvedev said. "All developments are immediately reported to him." Mr Yeltsin faces a difficult decision over whether to use force to end a crisis that could affect his hopes of re-election in June.

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international

Mass grave in Bosnia may hold 8,000 bodies

CHRISTOPHER BELLAMY
Defence Correspondent

British forces in Bosnia were last night keeping an eye on a vast, waterlogged open-cast iron ore mine in north-west Bosnia after allegations that thousands of bodies might be buried there.

The British troops, responsible for the area under Nato's Implementation Force (I-For), have contacted the international war crimes tribunal representatives in Sarajevo.

The tribunal is to send a team to investigate the mine at Ljubija, south-west of Prijedor, "in the near future". But although the British troops will report anything they find to him, they said yesterday their job is to keep the warring sides apart, not to go looking for war crimes or war criminals.

Ljubija is in Serb-held territory which will remain Serb under the Dayton peace deal.

suggesting any bodies found there are those of Muslims or Croats. It is now the base for the 2nd Battalion, the Light Infantry, which may have to guard the war crimes team if local Serbs oppose an investigation.

A report in the *New York Times* yesterday quoted a British officer as saying that troops in the region often come across bodies.

Zvonimir Cicak, of the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, said: "There were a lot of killings in Ljubija. We think there may be as many as 8,000 bodies in the mine. We have eyewitness testimony from people who saw the bodies. On top of the bodies they dumped lime. This is probably the largest mass grave in Serb-held Bosnia."

A spokesman at the British headquarters in Goranji Vakuf said: "We are investigating this report," but he added: "We

are reminding people that our first aim is to deal with the military aspects of the cease-fire."

Ljubija lies close to the front line reached by Croat and Muslim forces during their rapid advance in September, which led directly to the Dayton agreement.

The report of large numbers of bodies in the mine almost certainly refers to people killed in the summer of 1992. There were persistent reports at the time of bodies being dropped down mineshafts.

In Geneva an official of the war crimes tribunal said it has long been aware of allegations that Bosnian Serbs have been hiding bodies in mineshafts.

The deputy prosecutor, Graham Blewitt, said the tribunal believed gaining access to the region was one of its main priorities.

Mr Blewitt said Serbia was not co-operating with the tribunal despite a pledge to do so.

If it did not, he warned, the tribunal could complain to the UN Security Council that Belgrade was in "non-compliance" with the agreement, which diplomats say could be grounds for reimposing UN sanctions.

The British units in the area are patrolling both sides of the former front line, and negotiating with the local forces to get them to withdraw from the 4km "zone of separation". Part of the area patrolled by the British is now held by Bosnian Croats, but is to be handed back to the Bosnian Serbs.

■ Sarajevo—Bosnian Serbs lifted a threat to flee Sarajevo yesterday despite a rejection by the Nato secretary-general, Javier Solana, of their plea to delay the transfer of their suburbs to the government. About 70,000 Serbs were said to be ready to evacuate the city and burn their houses unless Nato delayed the hand-over.



Long goodbye: Bosnian Serbs leaving the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidza before the government take-over. Photograph: AP

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Balkan war is test site for US hi-tech planes

The US is using the Nato operation in Bosnia to continue tests of a high-altitude surveillance aircraft which has not been used in action since the Gulf war five years ago, writes Christopher Bellamy.

The device may be used to monitor the withdrawal of troops from areas to be handed over under the Dayton peace plan. The new owners are to occupy them by 20 March.

The Joint Surveillance Target and Attack Radar System, or Jstars, produced the spectacular radar images of the Gulf war battlefield which showed Iraqi forces streaming northwards towards the Euphrates, the first time a great battle unfolding had been captured in entirety in pictures.

The US is continuing to test two Jstars planes over the much more difficult landscape of Bosnia, with steep valleys, mountains and forest, the ultimate test of the system.

The use of Jstars over Bosnia has another potential advantage. The US has been trying to sell Jstars to Nato for years. Using Jstars over Bosnia as part of the Nato operation, Joint Endeavour, will be a strong selling point.

The alternatives are a British system, called Astor (Airborne Stand-Off Radar), the French Horizon, or the Italian Creso. Jstars and Astor are the only systems capable of monitoring an entire theatre of operations.

Astor will be more advanced but is not yet even in development phase.

Jstars would be used to monitor "vehicle-type movements" in Bosnia. Under the Dayton agreement, Bosnian Serb, Muslim and Croat forces are to withdraw from areas to be transferred other parties by 3 February. The new owners are to occupy them by 20 March.

Jstars can look out to a range of 200 nautical miles, so it can stay outside the range of surface-to-air missiles. It even has a memory to track strings of vehicles and wait for them to reappear out of a valley or from behind a mountain.

"If a convoy disappears it will alert you," a Northrop Grumman official said. "It has a memory. It knows where to look." Two of the E-8 Jstars aircraft – converted Boeing 707s – left the testing grounds of Northrop Grumman in Melbourne, Florida, for Bosnia on 14 December. The US Air Force has a requirement for 20 Jstars systems to be bought over the next 10 years at a total cost of \$5bn (£3.2bn) to \$7bn.

Jstars can receive pictures from E-3 Airborne Warning And Control System (Awacs) aircraft. Jstars will therefore be used to home in on contacts, for example, helicopter flights picked up by Awacs, as well as for closer analysis of events on the ground.

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Italy faces early poll as Dini finally resigns

ANDREW GUMBEL
Rome

Italy was plunged into a hazardous and uncertain government crisis yesterday after the resignation of Lamberto Dini and his team of technocratic ministers. Mr Dini reluctantly handed in his resignation as Prime Minister on Thursday night, having failed to persuade a fractious parliament to let him stay while it mapped out a smooth path to take Italy through its six-month presidency of the European Union and prepare calmly for a general election.

Although he acknowledged that his government's limited mandate was over, Mr Dini warned fervently against a "crisis in the dark". After three days of fruitless debate in the Chamber of Deputies, though, a crisis in the dark is exactly what Italy now has to face.

On Monday, President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro will begin exploratory talks with the speak-

during their recent presidencies. Is there any prospect of salvaging the mess? If a new government can be formed, the most likely scenario is another Dini-led administration, but this time with "political" ministers drawn from all sides with a mandate to carry out institutional reforms. These would include a new electoral law more likely to produce a workable governing majority when the country next goes to the polls.

The chances of finding the cross-party agreement needed for such a government, though, seem dim indeed. Italy has never managed to pass a single amendment to its 1948 constitution despite several abortive attempts. Moreover, the aims of the country's two main political blocks are diametrically opposed: the centre-left simply wants to introduce a two-round voting system, while the centre-right wants to transform the country's whole style of government and invest far greater powers in the prime minister.

Italy's inability to stabilise its political system has become a spectacle veering between tragedy and farce. Ever since the collapse of the old Christian Democrat-led order in 1992, there have been endless promises of sweeping change but precious little evidence of it. The media magnate Silvio Berlusconi claimed to have founded a "Second Republic" when he swept to power in March 1994, but his incongruous conservative coalition, supported by former neofascists on one side and northern separatists on the other, collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions after just seven months.

Mr Dini's government, voted in one year ago, was supposed to be a stopgap giving the country time to rethink its political system once again. Although he proved a competent technician, making the first significant cuts for years in Italy's runaway public deficit, the longevity of his government attest to the country's inability to find a way out of the impasse.

This is exactly the kind of mess Italy had hoped to avoid at the beginning of its EU presidency. The crisis is almost certain still to be hanging over the country when it hosts the crucial Inter-Governmental Conference in March. And if there are elections, Italy will be continuing an inglorious tradition already experienced by France and Germany.

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ST11

Leftist set to succeed grand old 'king' of Portugal



Left's choice: Jorge Sampaio being carried by supporters at a presidential election rally

ELIZABETH NASH
Lisbon

The campaign for tomorrow's presidential elections has reflected the general mood of the Portuguese people: laid-back for the most part, interrupted by bursts of agitation. Torrential rainstorms, the worst in more than 60 years, have jolted people's lives more than the election campaign, though passions flared in the closing days.

All but two contenders pulled out of the race this week, so tomorrow will see a straight fight between the mild Socialist former mayor of Lisbon, Jorge Sampaio, and the conservative former prime minister, Aníbal Cavaco Silva.

Mr Cavaco is better known, having led a 10-year conservative government before the Socialist election win last year. But Mr Sampaio is favourite to succeed Mario Soares, who bows out after the maximum 10 years as president during which he became Portugal's most loved and respected politician.

Should Mr Sampaio win, the Socialists would control the presidency, parliament and the big cities. He has been consistently ahead and the latest poll gives him the support of 53.1 per cent of voters, 13.2 per cent ahead of his rival (though an earlier poll put him only four points ahead).

Lisbon seems almost bare of election posters, in contrast to the hectic campaign of last October when a Socialist victory marked a political turn-around.

Sceptics point out that the government has delayed an-

nouncing a stringent budget until tomorrow's contest is out of the way, to give Mr Sampaio a fair wind.

The presidency is more than just ceremonial. The president can dissolve parliament if the government runs into difficulties, an important consideration with the Socialists four votes short of an overall majority, and can delay legislation.

The post is non-partisan; the Socialist Mr Soares succeeded so brilliantly in recycling himself as leader of all Portuguese that he is affectionately dubbed "The King".

The two candidates cannot, therefore, offer policy options. Mr Cavaco went so far as to hand in his Social Democratic Party card. They can only undertake a charm offensive to convince voters of their personal suitability. Neither is particularly charismatic, but as one observer noted yesterday: "Sampaio is more enigmatic, so people have less against him."

But party politicking is barely veiled. Mr Sampaio, while urging consensus, says a new age has dawned and suggests that voters have already thrown out everything Mr Cavaco represents. Mr Cavaco stresses his experience and his Catholicism – swipes at Mr Sampaio, who has never held national office and is both atheist and Jewish.

Mr Cavaco's message and his austere manner go down well in the conservative, Catholic northern part of the country. But they seem at odds with a broad trend towards moderate change, and Mr Sampaio's more easy-going style.

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obituaries / gazette

Eric Hebborn

Eric Hebborn was the most successful art forger this century. By his own account he passed off some 1,000 paintings and drawings, predominantly Old Masters, to galleries worldwide ranging from the British Museum in London to the National Gallery in Washington, the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York and the National Museum in Copenhagen. Art experts and historians, the dealers Cohnhag's and the auctioneers Sotheby's and Christie's, the vehicles of his deception, were all taken in by his work.

It was not until 1978, 15 years after he had started on his forging career, that he was exposed, by the journalist Geraldine Norman. And it was not until 1991, when he published his teasing autobiography *Drawn to Trouble: the forging of an artist*, that Hebborn himself admitted to his history.

He was born in 1934, the son of a grocer's assistant, in South Kensington, London, but brought up, to his chagrin, in Essex. At the age of eight he burnt down his school and was sent to Borstal. He was then put to foster parents and at 15 won a place from Mardon's Secondary School to Chelmsford Art School; from there he went to Walthamstow Art School, which made more of a specialty in painting, and in 1956 he graduated to the Royal Academy Art Schools, where he won the Silver Medal for painting and a Rome Scholarship in engraving, which took him to the British Academy in Rome for two years. Three years after leaving the academy schools, in 1963 he moved permanently to Italy. He had one-man shows of his own paintings in the 1970s and 1980s in Tivoli, Genoa, Hamburg, Manila and at the Alvin Gallery in London.

After the publication of *Drawn to Trouble*, he had shows of his paintings at the Julian Hartnett Gallery in London, and of his "fakes" at the Archreus Gallery. He was the subject of a BBC *Omnibus* film and last year published in Mi-

lan a book, *Il manuale del falso* ("A Fakir's Manual"), for which he was negotiating with an English publisher.

Eric Hebborn's autobiography, for a man not a practising writer, is as meticulously made as any of his Old Master drawings – and that ambiguity is intentional. He "adopted" my family (wife and three daughters) some 35 years ago, while living in Highbury, north London. At that time he was teaching at the Regent and Redhill School of Art, and dealing in watercolours of the Norwich School. He became godfather to our youngest daughter. What he saw in such a family remains a mystery, unless he found in us a substitute for his own, then long-lost siblings.

His greatest qualities were generosity, loyalty and – against all evidence – honesty. These qualities remained constant; whatever the defects or ups-and-

downs of those he knew. He was always a giver. And he regarded debt as a matter of honour – creditors (perhaps with the exception of lawyers) were always eventually paid.

Honesty, of course, is philosophically difficult to define. Hebborn's often-quinted dictum that attributions to his drawings were made by others – never by him – applied equally to his way of living. None who knew him well ever saw him dissemble: what you saw was what you got.

For some 30 years he was a resident of Anticoli Corrado, near Rome, where, to his unabashed delight, he was known, particularly in the village bars, as "Il Professore" ("It only means teacher," he said).

Earlier, following his Rome Scholarship, he lived in the gatehouse to the Villa Doria Pamphilj in Rome, and in Via Giulia. He then rented the Vil-

la San Filippo, below the village of Anticoli, a few miles outside the city, on the road to Subiaco. This had been the home of many popes' gardeners.

Looking for somewhere more permanent, he once showed me an abandoned barn in a wood beneath Anticoli (a village famous in Italy not only for its resident artists, but for its artists' models). "I'll make that my home," he said. Employing local builders and his own, then great strength, he built Santa Maria in Bosco di Ciabatta ("Slipper Wood"), where he was to spend all but the last few years of his life.

It was in Santa Maria that he began, for the first time in years, to create his own work – translating and illustrating the *Epic of Gilgamesh*; composing his autobiography, and painting. An exhibition of his watercolours of Tivoli and its environment at the Villa d'Este was not only a sell-out, but resulted in more commissions than he could accept.

As he aged – his beloved Chiari took its toll – he found travelling on foot (the only way) from Santa Maria to Anticoli an impossibility. So he left to live in an apartment in Piazza San Giovanni della Malva, in Trastevere, his spiritual home.

Hebborn was – and this comes out well in the autobiography – a remarkable raconteur. His tales pointed up to his phenomenal (if selective) memory, an ability which enabled him to assimilate, in time, Italian, Spanish – and Latin. He translated (and illustrated) Lorca and, over many years, the sonnets of Michelangelo and Giuseppe Belli. The latter, who wrote in the language of the ordinary Roman people, appealed particularly to one who saw no differences in humankind.

In response to his critics, he wrote: "I have never considered myself a misunderstood genius, or for that matter a genius at all. No one asked me to become an artist, and the world does not owe me a living."

Barry Cole



Pen-and-ink drawing by Hebborn of his friend Anthony Blunt, c.1979. Hebborn's good connections helped him in his deception



Photograph: B. Donatello / Agence Contrasto

What you saw was what you got: Hebborn in 1990

It was clear he knew I didn't believe him and he didn't mind that at all. He talked a lot about Tom Keating, another British picture faker, who I'd helped to write a book. Hebborn twisted me about it and led me on to think that he was teetering on the brink of telling all himself – but then held back with a twinkle in the eye as if to say: "You can't catch me as easily as that." It was not, in fact, until 1991 that he published his own book, *Drawn to Trouble*, in which he finally admitted that he was the author of literally hundreds of fake Old Master drawings.

He did not, as far as I know, make a lot of money out of picture faking, but he was exceptionally successful in terms of hoodwinking art historians.

Tom Keating made money at country auctions where hopeful but uninformed buyers thought they were making "discoveries"; he also got half a dozen works in the style of Samuel Palmer past Sotheby's and two Bond Street dealers, Colnaghi's and Leger's, thus arousing the suspicion of art historians – which led to his downfall.

Van Meegeren, the famous Dutch faker of the late 1930s and 1940s, got his Vermeers past one ageing scholar – Abraham Bredius – while Elmy de Hory sold Picasso and Modigliani on a massive scale to an American millionaire called Meadows. They were spotted once Meadows began to

show them to experts. Hebborn's extraordinary success lay in deceiving the art historians themselves.

He didn't sell direct to museums. He put his Old Master drawings into Sotheby's and Christie's auctions and sold them to leading London dealers – who passed them on to museums. Before he was unmasked, his drawings had been bought as genuine by the British Museum, the National Gallery, Washington, the National Gallery of Canada, the Royal Museum of Copenhagen and the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. That meant hoodwinking a awful lot of art historians.

Meegeren and many other fakers, his prime motivation seems to have been resentment at his lack of recognition as an artist in his own right. By successfully deceiving experts he was able to tell himself that "they knew nothing and were wrong to ignore his own work. Maybe he could also tell himself that he was just as good as the artists he imitated. In any case, he had a masterly understanding of art-historical bullshit, and he managed to leave many scholars with red faces.

Eric Hebborn, artist, sculptor, forger: born London 20 March 1934; died Rome 11 January 1990.

Like Tom Keating. van

Professor Seton Lloyd

Seton Lloyd's long archaeological career began in 1929 in Egypt, moved to Iraq in 1930 where it continued throughout the Second World War and after, and in 1949 moved again to Turkey for 12 years. From 1962 to 1969 he was Professor of Western Asiatic Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology at London University, and in his many years of retirement he remained active and involved until very lately. His knowledge of Near Eastern archaeology was unrivalled and survives in many meticulous academic publications as well as more readable works for a wider public.

Lloyd was born in 1902 into a substantial Quaker background of well-known names, whose family ramifications gave him widespread circles of kinship. He was educated at Uppingham and subsequently studied at the Architectural Association, qualifying in 1928. During this time he worked for two years as assistant to Sir Edwin Lutyens. This architectural training proved an invaluable resource in his subsequent career in archaeology, where his understanding of how buildings work gave him an unusual and special perspective.

His field career spanned a range of archaeological fashions, extending from the lavishly

funded American excavations of pre-war days to the shoestring but resourceful British excavations after the war. It reached up to the beginning of modern archaeology, heavily science-based and directed to maximum data retrieval. But Lloyd's style of painstaking and methodical excavation and publication strove towards an understanding of the past which is surely still valid.

In both Iraq and Turkey his name is associated with the breaking of new ground both in the location of sites and in the identification of cultures, and his successors have constantly found themselves walking in his footsteps. Among his contemporaries there were figures more extrovert and flamboyant than he, yet the record of work which he has hequeathed compares favourably with them.

The story of his colourful life is best told by himself in his memoirs, *The Interval*, published by him in retirement in 1986. His switch from architecture to archaeology was entirely fortuitous. In 1929 he replaced at the last minute a friend engaged as architectural advisor on the British excavation at El-Amarna in Egypt. This brought him into contact with H. Frankfort, whom he always spoke of as a major in-

tellectual influence. Subsequently Frankfort, commissioned by the Oriental Institute, Chicago, to undertake excavations on the Diyala river in Iraq, persuaded Lloyd to join his team. After his initial task of building and equipping the palatial excavation house in the middle of nowhere, Lloyd played a prominent part in those enormous productive operations, running from 1930 to 1937, and in the substantial publications which flowed from them.

Now his links with John Garstang's excavations at Mersin in 1937 and 1938 gave Lloyd his first taste of Turkey, and he then took the opportunity to make the difficult journey through south-east Turkey to northern Iraq, where he conducted the very important Sinjar survey.

He was then offered the post of Archaeology Adviser to the Directorate of Antiquities in Baghdad, which he took up in 1939. This had the unforeseeable consequence that he spent the war largely in Iraq, and was fully caught up in the dramatic political events there, the pro-Nazi coup and the British counter-strike and occupation. In the intervals between these events he was able to conduct some notable research, principally the excavation of the painted temple at Uqair and later of Tell

Hassuna, where he identified a new culture – and the earliest known – in Iraq. In 1943 he met Ulrica Hyde ("Hyde"), whom he married the following year.

Continuing in his Baghdad post after the war, Lloyd's main archaeological activity was the excavation of Eridu, an early Sumerian city, in collaboration with Fuad Safar. Also at this time he and Hyde acquired Woolstone Lodge, the house just below the Berkshire White Horse which was to be their family home for the rest of their lives.

Now his links with John Garstang bore fruit, for when the latter succeeded in establishing a new British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, Seton Lloyd was invited to become its first director. He moved to Ankara in 1949 and during the next 12 years acquired Woolstone Lodge, the house just below the Berkshire White Horse which was to be their family home for the rest of their lives.

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The Independent Weekend.

**Whitney Houston
has a lot to
smile about:
Nicole David is
her agent**

A week in the life
of a Hollywood
dealmaker, page 7

INSIDE STORIES

There's something enjoyable about writing violent stuff,' says Nick Cave, 'about sitting down and making a character so naive and virtuous, then wiping her out. What I found exciting was creating songs where I could go into some detail about the savagery of the act'

5 'Men want to compliment the woman, so they buy a smaller size bra which only makes her feel worse,' says Mrs Box of Knickerbox. 'We get a lot of red satin coming back. The guys might like it but the girls bring it back and exchange it for white cotton'

21 Perhaps it's because Christmas is the only time when busy families can sit down and make decisions, but January is no longer the ugly sister of the property year. Sales are up, and it's not just down to the seasonal batch of sales by divorcees

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Alan Bennett wishes you a rewarding New Year with the London Review of Books

**London Review
OF BOOKS**



David Frost's rise as a political commentator is in direct proportion to the decline of respect for politicians. Major, Blair and Ashdown merely trot along to be lightly grilled by Frost, and indeed use the occasion for statements of policy and matters of national importance. It's as if Jesus were to undertake the feeding of the Five Thousand as a contribution to *Challenge America*.

Alan Bennett, in the current issue of the *London Review of Books*

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THE QUICK GETAWAY
GUIDE TO WEEKEND
SKIING
Pages 14 & 15

THE ARTS COUNCIL OF ENGLAND

picture story



Pictures by
Laurie Lewis
Story by Nick
Kimberley

PIT STOP

Eight days to curtain up on Covent Garden's new staging of Michael Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* and the press is buzzing with rumours of the backstage dramas revealed in a BBC fly-on-the-wall documentary due to go out on the opera's opening night. No signs of panic, though, as Monday's rehearsals get under way.

The stage is littered with cool-boxes and picnic-baskets. Act 3 is party time. From

the back of the auditorium, Graham Vick (director), Wolfgang Göbel (lighting)

and Paul Brown (design) watch proceedings. Their desk, with its bank of computer screens, mikes and sundry electrics, is Mission Control.

Io the pit, Sir Bernard Haitink, music director, runs through one of the opera's "Ritual Dances", the dancers audibly panting at their exertions. Directly behind Haitink in the stalls, David Syrus, who will conduct one performance, checks Haitink's timings, using a pencil for a baton. He mutters to Haitink, who cocks an ear without missing a beat. Out in the auditorium, people whisper and scuffle: just like any night at the opera. Soloists and chorus join proceedings. Eventually Haitink calls, "I think we'll leave it there." The pit empties in no time. An oboist stays behind to practise her runs. Vick shouts to his design team, "Wolfgang! We've got five minutes," as if this is a heavenly gift. Everyone else is off to the canteen. There, Pearl de Coteau is used to clearing up after singers. She's worked here for eight years but when I ask if she ever attends a performance, she says "No" as if it's a particularly stupid question. Do the singers ever act like, well, prima donnas? "They're always well behaved... with me," she replies, suggesting that misbehaviour would be more than their careers were worth.

Meanwhile, Vick has called his singers into an upstairs room to talk through their parts. The photographer and I are asked to leave. Back downstairs, Haitink takes the chorus through a number and politely suggests, "I think it'll help if we go over this once more." As the music plays, there is rustling from Mission Control. Haitink, the merest hint of asperity in his tone, calls, "Stop talking, please. Shut up!" At the next break, Vick throws his arm around the conductor's shoulder: "Bernard, I'm sorry." That's as close as it gets to friction. Io the pit, a lone violinist makes amendments to his score while Stephen O'Mara, the tenor lead, asks Haitink's advice about a difficult phrase he has to sing. Haitink talks him through it.

In the final session, problems occur with moving parts that don't move, while the bass, John Tomlinson, struggles with a huge length of fabric that gets tangled. Scurrying, as if to evade notice, Vick potters about the stage, showing exactly the movement he's after. He mimics the jerky spasms he wants from one singer, while all around the chorus sings, "Is it a vision? Is it a dream?"

Finally, Haitink's brisk "Thank you!" dismisses the orchestra. Vick is still advising the chorus: "If any of you has a picnic basket that can be stood in, stand on it." At the edge of the stage, a dancer massages a colleague's neck. Flat on her back, another goes through complex stretching exercises. Choreographer Ron Howell thanks his charges. Vick calls to his designer: "Paul, do you want to see John's wig tomorrow?" The answer is curt: "No." Rehearsal is over. Seven days to go.

'The Midsummer Marriage' at the Royal Opera House, London WC2, 16, 19, 27 Jan, 8, 12 and 14 Feb. Booking: 0171-304 4000



Take it from the top: picture below, Ron Howell (left) and Sir Bernard Haitink, music director of the Royal Opera; second left, Christopher Ventris and Lilliane Watson



THIS WEEKEND WHY NOT...

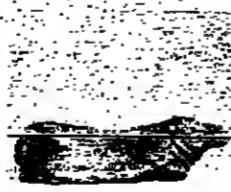
TAKE PART IN A Gamelan Workshop



In school music lessons, the percussion section used to be distinctly unglamorous. Who wanted to be caught dead bonging a chime bar or jingling away on the triangle? Being left in charge of a kettle drum or a massive pair of cymbals did have a certain allure though. Nothing, however, in comparison with the wonders of a gamelan ensemble. The South Bank Centre is running two two-hour "taster" workshops on their own genuine Javanese gamelan collection, a range of instruments that renders Western instruments anodyne. You need no musical experience and anyone from the age of seven upwards is invited to make music. And you thought J Arthur Rank was the last word in gongs.

11.30am, 3pm South Bank Centre, London SE1 (0171-960 4242) Adults £5 Children £2.50 Family tickets (2 adults and up to 3 children) £10.

BUY Derek Pearce Sculpture



In a completely original niche between furniture design and sculpture you'll find the remarkable Derek Pearce. A master craftsman and designer, he has also worked as a composer and an actor, which accounts for the dramatic element to his elegant, witty pieces, particularly the Water Tables. The Hippo table sees the carved wooden creature peeping over the water, in the form of the glass table top. Others include a round pond table supported by three cold-cast bronze diving ducks, or the sublime table held aloft by two bronze synchronised swimmers. His recent homage to Charles Rennie Mackintosh incorporated an immaculately carved mackintosh lying on a wooden table. It was commissioned by Glasgow airport, the perfect place to let his imagination take flight.

The Hippo Table is £4,500. Others start at £2,500. Derek Pearce is on 0181-741 0819. (0121-212 1111).

WATCH Mark Elder conduct Holst



Early 20th-century British composers have a bad name. Carping critics allude to the over-reliance on folk-tunes, lumping composers into the English "cow-pat school". Gustav Holst would appear to be one of the unwitting founder-members of this so-called school; Delius, a Bradford wool merchant's son who died of syphilis in France, is on the edge. Tippett meanwhile is completely outside it. In any event, conductor Mark Elder (above) would probably pooh-pooh the entire lame-brained theory. Tonight he conducts works by all three composers with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in the glorious acoustic of their very own Symphony Hall. Why Elder is not the musical director of an opera house or the artistic director of one of our major orchestras is an abiding mystery.

7.30pm Symphony Hall, Birmingham (0121-212 1111).

CATCH The Bluetones in Dublin



Headlining the twinkling NME/Miller Genuine Draft Brat Bus Tour, Hounslow's very own The Bluetones are the name on every pop-picker's pickled pucker as the band to bank on in 1996. They jangle expertly, their melodies turn lovely corners, and their mop-tops are all their own. Furthermore, their first baby is due any week now. Britpop may be dead but the electric guitar carries on regardless. Bratty support comes in the many shapes of the Cardigans, Heavy Stereo and Notting Hill's ghastly Fluffy, who are every bit as irritating as they sound. The tour hits Dublin tonight before moving on over the coming week to Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, Wolverhampton, Bristol, Cambridge and London.

Dublin tickets £8.75 (00 353 1 456 9569).

LISTEN TO Simon Armitage reading poetry



As events in their own rights, literary prizes are about as attention-grabbing as a pair of Y-fronts hung out to dry on a washing line. But in that they spawn related events (usually gatherings of closet poetry fanatics), they are to be obsequiously thanked. Take the TS Eliot Poetry Prize, for example, which "aims to stimulate interest in contemporary poetry" with a £25,000 carrot. If it does so, it will be more due to this opportunity to see and hear all 10 shortlisted poets in one place tomorrow night than because of the final selection. Now's your chance to catch up on the "new lad" poets (Simon Armitage, above, and Glyn Maxwell), as well as discover the lesser-known, diverse entertainments of Katherine Pierpoint, Maurice Riordan and others. Fear not: none is averse to a good threepenny bit.

7pm, Sun, Almeida Theatre, Almeida St, London, N1 (0171-359 4404/22).

CHM 150

Jy Vito 150

interview



Nick Cave was a very bad seed indeed. He did the drugs, the room wrecking, the whole rock schtick. But now the last cool God has grown up. Now he's just like me.

By Andy Gill
Photograph by Steve Double

There was a time, back in the Eighties, when Nick Cave was the biggest roaring-boy reprobate in rock music. Tales were rife of his behaviour pursued almost as an act of faith: of the time he physically attacked a journalist who probed his heroin addiction a little too tenaciously; or the time he pulled a syringe from his arm and started writing a letter in his own blood – on board a London tube train.

Since then, Cave's grown a little more mature. He's published an acclaimed novel, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*; acted in several films, including his friend Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire*; been through rehab for the heroin addiction; and finally has his drinking under control. Perhaps not coincidentally, his albums have become more successful, both critically and commercially – they now routinely sell more than a quarter of a million copies, unusual for a fringe artist – and in the past couple of years, he's got married, become a father, and separated, as if packing an entire adult life into a matter of months.

Now, he's contemplating murder. Bloody, violent, senseless murder, and plenty of it. Cave's forthcoming album *Murder Ballads* (released 5 February) features nine gory examples of the genre capped with a version of Bob Dylan's "Death is Not the End" which turns that episode of hope into a bleak promise of further tribulation. If, as seems likely, the album continues the current upward trajectory of his career, there will be a fine irony in this most self-destructive of artists deriving his greatest success from death, when for many years, he had seemed to be on a more personal collision-course with it.

In a hotel suite near his Notting Hill flat, Cave chain-smokes and drinks tea while mus-

ing on his latest project and his past reputation. "People expect certain things from me," he says. "And I guess they're disappointed when they don't get them." Always obsessive about language, his comments come via a stutter of aborted sentences, as he seeks the most accurate way of phrasing. With his generous lips and upturned nose, he has something of the aspect of a pugnacious romantic, though with a cartoon side that offsets his seriousness (Billy Bragg once cogently compared him to the Cat in the Hat, from the Dr Seuss children's books). He seems more focused than the last time I spoke to him, a few years ago. Then, he had knocked the heroin and the speed off the head, and was tackling the alcohol problem on a daily basis, "just trying to drink one day at a time – but I don't feel like I've gone through something and risen into this blazing white light, or whatever". Now, a mutual friend reports, he's completely off the booze, too: "It's quite annoying – now you have to lay on the Ribena for when Nick comes round."

The son of a librarian and a teacher, Cave was born in Warracknabeal, a small country town 180 miles north of Melbourne, in September 1957. Through his teens, he developed the exhibitionist manner that would later serve him well in his Iggy Pop-style stage performances, getting a reputation for taking his clothes off at parties, and developing an interest in the various rock 'n' roll libations. An equally significant spur to future endeavours, however, was provided by his father, who read Nabokov's *Lolita* to him when he was 15.

Inspired by the punk revolution, Cave's first group, The Boys Next Door, pursued a typically rowdy path through the Eastern Australian states, getting banned from many venues for their behaviour and their uncompromising music, which was completely at odds with the general run of Aussie R&B pub-rock. On one occasion, he and bassist Tracy Pew were arrested when, en route to a show in Canberra, they urinated out of the back of the band van while it was moving; the car behind, unfortunately for them, contained a local policeman's wife, who was convinced they had been masturbating for several miles.

It was around this time that Cave first experimented with heroin, developing the habit which would, over the next decade and a half, lead him into some of the world's less salubrious districts, reaching a nadir of sorts in 1986, when he was hustled in New York for possession of heroin and syringes. A week later in Los Angeles, attempting to score in the wrong part of town, he was robbed at gunpoint. Eventually, after pleading guilty to another bust in 1988, he would enter a detox programme at a Weston-Super-Mare clinic.

In February 1980, the group – now renamed The Birthday Party – relocated to London, the first of a succession of moves which has seen the restless singer set up home in places as far afield as Berlin and São Paulo. "He likes to put himself in outsider situations," explains Cave's friend, the photographer Bleddyin Butcher. As the band hurtled full-speed towards its eventual dissolution in 1983, Cave began work on a manuscript which would eventually be published in 1989 as *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. An ambitious work whose florid, anachronistic prose style attempts to capture the inner voice of a mute psychotic in the early decades of this century, the novel represents the apotheosis of several themes which had become constants in his work with The Birthday Party and, later, on a series of albums with The Bad Seeds: sex, death, violence, religion and the American South.

"I was quite possessed when I wrote that book, it just poured out, unstoppable," he recalls. "It purged a lot of things that had been plaguing me for a long time."

The novel went on to sell an astonishing 15,000 hardback copies in the UK, and a further 35,000 copies when Penguin put out the paperback – extraordinary for a first novel – and was widely acclaimed as a prodigious feat of imagination. But, apotheosis or not, it clearly didn't drain Cave of his interest in violent death, judging by *Murder Ballads*. It's a strange, album, suspended somewhere between despair and black comedy, with few punches pulled. Innocents are slaughtered without remorse, madmen (and madwomen) stalk the songs, and corpses litter the proceedings.

One song alone, the 15-minute-long "O'Malley's Bar", has the kind of body-count that would raise even Quentin Tarantino's eyebrows, but without bothering with anything as trumpery as motivation. Basically, it's a simple case of man enters bar, man shoots everyone in bar, doo in a kind of narrative slow-motion that's something like the aural equivalent of Peckinpah's cinematic shoot-ups.

"I wrote that in all sorts of different states of mind," Cave explains. "I remember sitting by the pool on tour, with a banana daiquiri in my hand, writing several verses and thinking I wanted to somehow get 'banana daiquiri' in the song, that one of the characters should be drinking that. I think it goes, 'So then I approached Robert Thackeray, and shot him right through his banana daiquiri', or something like that.

"It's one of those ongoing shaggy-dog-story type songs that if you've got a spare moment you can always write a verse for. Which ends up making interesting songs – you can't really remember what you've written before, so your sympathies towards the central character change a lot. Within that particular song, which is for me the main song on the record, there's a good indication of my mixed feelings towards that type of killer: on the one hand, being quite sympathetic towards his plight, finding a certain amount of rage and disgust at a society that creates a situation where somebody has to go out and do something horrendous like this in order to get a little meaning into their life, but at the same time being unsympathetic towards that character because he's killed a lot of innocent people."

This is as close as Cave gets to sitting in judgement on his characters – though even that is a more persuasive demonstration of sympathy than is extended to the victims. There's a powerful sense of alienation about the album, as if Cave wanted to indulge certain morbid, violent fantasies and at the same time drain them of their glamour, defusing the myth of the superman-psychopath as fostered so assiduously by Hollywood. In these *Murder Ballads*, we're constantly forced to confront what Hanan Arendt once famously called "the hanality of evil".

"Exactly," Cave agrees. "Very often murder seems to be simply a case of lack of imagination, more than anything else. Derek Raymond, the crime writer, was getting to a very interesting point with his books before his death: his take was that the criminal was a bore, and especially the murderer."

"Even though the songs have the idea of murder linking them together," Cave continues, "some of them are just flat-out comic songs, nothing more than that. 'The Kindness of Strangers', for instance, is simply an exercise in cruelty, sitting down and writing a character and making her so naive and virtuous, then wiping her out. I can't define this, but there is a certain satisfaction in doing that. You can see it done on a grand scale in the Marquis de Sade: *Justine* is about that, and Nabokov's *Lolita*, too, to a certain extent – the killing of the mother especially. Just sitting down and inventing a character that would be a delight to kill, and killing her."

Other songs are less easily assimilated into the realms of cruelty or comedy. The single "Where the Wild Roses Grow", on which Cave duets with his fellow Australian Kylie Minogue in a tale of romantic obsession slipping into homicide, is, despite the apparent incongruity of the partnership, a genuinely hegeling piece of work which brought the singer a delicious cold collation of revenge when it reached number one in Australia – quite a change from when he first left his homeland, when his fans numbered at most between two to three hundred die-hard punks. Not surprisingly, he's quietly delighted with its success.

"You only have to listen to the song to realise that it was a marriage made in heaven, really," he says of the duet. "To me, it was a perfect coupling of voices and characters. I'm immensely proud of that little episode in my creative life. It's something I've wanted to do for years, sing a song with Kylie Minogue." One of the LP's more haunting moments, it's the kind of song which would not have been out of place on the recent album of death songs from the man Cave acknowledges as "the master of the murder ballad", Johnny Cash.

Though he's grown bored with the genre, Cave was until recently a keen enthusiast of crime fiction, particularly the visceral novels of James Ellroy. The respect is apparently mutual: Ellroy, who dislikes most rock music on principle, gave Cave a signed copy of *White Jazz* bearing the inscription "Nick, feel those evil rock 'n' roll chords of doom. That song in *Until the End of the World* really kicked my ass!"

"For me, there is something enjoyable about writing violent stuff," Cave admits. "There's certain types of language that can be exciting to use, particularly in the song format, where descriptive violence really hasn't existed, apart from gangsta-rap, but even in those they generalise the act quite a lot, simply because songs are short things and you can't go into too much detail. What I found exciting about writing the *Murder Ballads* thing was creating songs where I could go into some detail about the savagery of the act."

Cave subscribes to the Manichean notion of fundamental good and evil operating within us all, but he abhors organised religion: indeed, his *Murder Ballads* album is unique within his canon of nine albums in featuring no preachers. When I point this out, he is cheerfully aghast: "Good God! I should have murdered one of them, at least!" It's in this spirit, rather than with any moralistic or apocalyptic intention, that the album is intended to be taken.

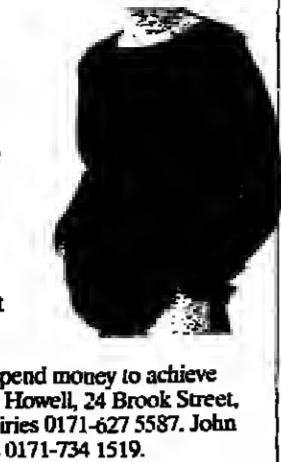
"This record is chiefly a comic record, it's designed to be funny," Cave concludes. "It didn't start off that way, but as soon as we started to make it, it became clear that the whole idea was quite ludicrous, to be making an entire record like this. Maybe going out and finding a dozen traditional murder ballads might be fair enough, but to actually sit down and have to write all this stuff... it became a bit of a joke."

But a sick joke, mercifully. Anything less would be quite out of character.

shopping

six of the best jumpers

1 Margaret Howell, £130 John Smedley T-shirt, £50.



The jumper is open weave navy linen, and has side vents. Layered over a Sea Island cotton "Second Skin" T-shirt, it looks effortlessly chic. This is perfect for the man who likes to feel casual – but also likes to spend money to achieve the look. Margaret Howell, 24 Brook Street, London W1. Enquiries 0171-627 5587. John Smedley, enquiries 0171-734 1519.

2 BHS, £20 Undeniably the best bargain of the lot. At only £20, this is an easy buy which will see you through sloppy-joe weekends, and will be a favourite with your girlfriend, who will probably try to pinch it at every opportunity. It is 87 per cent cotton, so is lovely against the skin. Available from BHS stores nationwide. Enquiries: 0171-262 3288.



3 Replay, £95 The jumper suitable for a lad's night out. It's big, comfy, cuddly, and it's 50 per cent cotton, 50 per cent acrylic. For the label-conscious man, who likes to wear his label on the outside without being too obvious. Replay, 52 Long Acre, London WC2. Enquiries: 0171-267 5632.



4 Woodhouse, £79.95 with French Connection cardigan, £60. The jumper (which should be tucked in to your trousers) is from the Jarvis Cocker school of fashion and has that "grown out of it" appeal. It also a classic which should see you through winter and spring. The cardigan is similarly Joe Cockerish – short on waistband, long in the arms. Cardigan available from French Connection stores nationwide; enquiries 0171-580 2507. Woodhouse, enquiries: 0171-629 1254.



5 Assets, £85 This company is consistently on the pulse with its laid back and tactile collections for men and women. This jumper, which is 57 per cent cotton, 30 per cent nylon and 13 per cent lycra, is extremely comfortable, fluid, and easy to wear with casual and pseudo-smart clothes. Available from Assets, 29 Floral Street, London WC2. Enquiries 0171-625 8423.



6 Armand Basi, £70 John Smedley jumper around neck (£65.) The Basi jumper was a bit itchy, but otherwise comfy and practical. In mild weather it could take the place of a jacket. The Smedley is made from super-fine wool and seen here serves well as a glorified scarf. Armand Basi, enquiries: 0171-379 3843. John Smedley as before.



The \$1,300 question

Would you fly 5,000 miles for a customised shopping experience? Christina Bloom did

I phone my friend Janet in California. "I'm coming to do some shopping." "You're coming five thousand miles to go shopping?" she asks, incredulous. "Why not? I have Frequent Flyer miles to burn and a partner who's spent so much time flying the Friendly Skies he's positively keen to spend a week minding the children."

"How about the Macy's customised shopping service, then?" says Janet, and sends me the details.

The service is called "Macy's By Appointment" and is managed by Joanna Chang. You call her to let her know which days and approximate times you'll be at Macy's and give her your size, type of merchandise you need, designer favourites and any restrictions you may have. The service provides everything from clothes and hats to household goods.

"Do you have any sense of what size you might be in US terms?" Joanna asks when I phone.

"Erm, a 12, maybe a 10," I reply. US sizes go down to six. "And five foot two," I add.

"So, petites," she says. "And corporate, right?"

"Yes, smart clothes. The real emergency is work clothes." I've been wearing the same red jacket for three years, and my skirts date back to the mid-Eighties. Joanna is reassuring.

Five thousand miles later, I'm at the Stanford Shopping Center. A select mall in Palo Alto, not far from San Francisco, and walking distance from one of the most expensive private universities in the US, it doesn't suffer from modesty: Macy's, Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Emporium and Nordstrom are all here. Along the flowery boulevards with their cool fountains ("Recycled/Reclaimed Water as part of Stanford Shopping Center's water conservation"), there are other select establishments: Imaginarium ("A Toy Store Kids Can Handle"); A Pea in the Pod ("Maternity Redefined"); Learningsmith ("A General Store for the Curious Mind").

I meet Joanna in her Macy's office, with its suite of private dressing rooms. She's prepared a splendid selection of clothes for me to try on. Incredibly, they fit. The waists are right, the hems are correct, the shoulders work without being tight across the bust. As they say in California, no journey is too long to find out who you are. I've discovered my true nature: US size 12, petite. The clothes are stunning, designed for women who expect to be seen. Styles are imaginative, fabrics comfortable and interesting. Fortified

with a jug of coffee and dainty biscuits, we work hard. Joanna, meditating between dressing room and sales floor, is indispensable. She listens, advises and fine-tunes. Her instincts and knowledge of stock are sound.

She finds me things I'd never think to look for. I try on an tweedy jacket to discover that the fit is immaculate, the style precisely Nineties and cleverly understated and that the tweed, being a wool/silk mix, moulds itself winningly to my awkward 36E bust.

An off-the-peg Jones of New York, it costs \$208 (£139). Joanna brings me a coordinating, tailored wool crepe skirt at \$88 (£58) and a matching silk shell, \$60 (£40). We find a Carole Little dress in a perky short pleated style and interesting Italian fabric for \$128 (£85) and a Carole Little knit suit in aquamarine, embellished with intricate sparkly black beading for \$198 (£132).

It's elegant and coolly comfortable; a soft skirt with elasticated waist and a well-shaped long cardigan.

Inevitably, my budget resolve begins to weaken. I can feel money melting. Joanna finds me a winter coat whose fit and style are heavenly: a double-breasted Kristen Blake in wool camel. "As it happens," she says, "I think that one

comes at 30 per cent off." It costs \$180 (£120).

Four hours later, I've made my selection. "I'll total this up for you" says Joanna, coming back with a price of \$1,700. It's a moment which requires a steady nerve. "That's too much," I say. "What do you think I could leave?" Willingly, she helps me prune out non-essentials. I'm left with a bill of \$1,300 (£867), which includes: a Gianni blouse for \$90 (£60); a Charter Club Classics green wool blazer-cut jacket, lined with brown satin so that you can wear it with the cuffs rolled back, reduced from \$159 to \$99.99 (£66); black leather Boulian shoes, \$69 (£46); a Liz Claiborne fleur-de-lis waistcoat, a snip at \$48 (£32). Shop till you



Macy's personal shopping service is pleasant, efficient and honest

drop? Not exactly. It's been pleasant, efficient, and honest.

The savvy shopper, though, doesn't stop there. I cruise the sales to flesh out the new look, stocking up in Emporium's "Career Sportswear" department with cotton and silk shirts, Jordache stretch jeans and leggings; matt silk knit polo shirts in wonderful hues at \$12 (£8) a throw; half-price Liz Claiborne summer wear; T-shirts and sweaters at under \$15 (£10) each in black, white and adventurous. For \$200 (£133) I have all the separates and casual clothes I could want. In the leather department I find a compact leather handbag for \$22 (£14), and a Michael Stevens soft brown leather satchel, ideal for A4

papers and complete with zips, compartments and pen-holders, for a mere £14 (£9).

Then I drive down to leafy University Avenue and recover in an elegant cafe with coffee and a cinnamon roll.

HM Customs and Excise takes a dim view of people bringing goods into the country from abroad avoiding paying duty on them. The allowance you get is £136; above that, it's charged at 13.8 per cent duty, and then VAT is added to the total at 17.5 per cent (excluding children's clothes). At the prices I paid, it's still a win.

Joanna Chang, Manager, Macy's By Appointment, 300 Stanford Center, California; (001 415 323 3578).

William Long of Loughton, Essex, for his wicked suggestion in our competition that an Evelyn Waugh bookplate should be stuck in a copy of the *Watchtower* omnibus to confuse literary historians. The 23 paper bookplates donated to a Sotheby's charity sale last month by Waugh's son, Auberon, fetched £310.

We also liked the well-pondered list of 19 titles from Philip Jaggard of Oxford. He evidently shares Mr Long's eagerness to rock assumptions about Waugh's Roman Catholicism. His list includes Elaine Pagels' "The Gnostic Gospels". He also listed E. Murphy's "Great Bordellos of the World" next to Nancy Mitford's "Noblesse Oblige". Waugh is clearly an author who left much to the imagination.

John Windsor

collecting • antiques, galleries

FINE ANTIQUE DINING TABLES

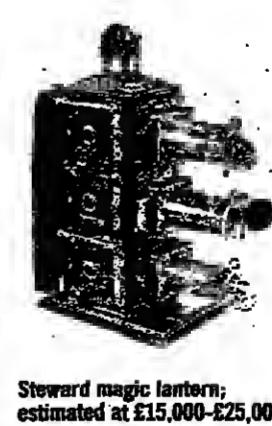
A good selection of 19th century mahogany extending dining tables always in stock.



Probably the world's finest

museum collection of magic lanterns and slides is at Christie's South Kensington, Thursday (10.30am). The 159 lots were formerly exhibited in Llandaff Wells, but some have been in public performances given by their owners, Doug and Anita Lear, throughout Europe and on their narrowboat. The magic lantern, a favourite in homes of all social classes and church halls between 1860 and 1910, became capable of surprisingly sophisticated effects: "slipping" slides could make the image of a man swallow a rat (a set of eight rat slides is estimated at £120-£180) and the "super three-lens" Steward lantern restored by the Lears from gas and limelight to electricity (shown here) can dissolve between images and produce other special effects such as falling snow. Estimate: £15,000-£25,000.

What is it about the taste of hidden in the Nineties that reminds us of the Eighties? As markets gather momentum again it is the flashy, conspicuous things that sell best. Take jewellery: pretty little Georgian brooches are as undervalued as they were five years ago. In Christie's fortnightly sale on Tuesday (2pm), the sort of flaunt-it gear that will walk out of the room is the big. Twenties sapphire and diamond brooch with bold Art Deco geometric shape and "plenty of material" – that is, crammed with stones.



Steward magic lantern; estimated at £15,000-£25,000

notably Minton and Majolica. But there is the beginning of a price revival in the more delicate English pottery of the late 18th and early 19th century (Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Swansea) which was once much loved but now as much in disfavour as Georgian silver.

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Queues at returns counters all through January have one main cause: the male's inability to learn from experience

By Louise Levene

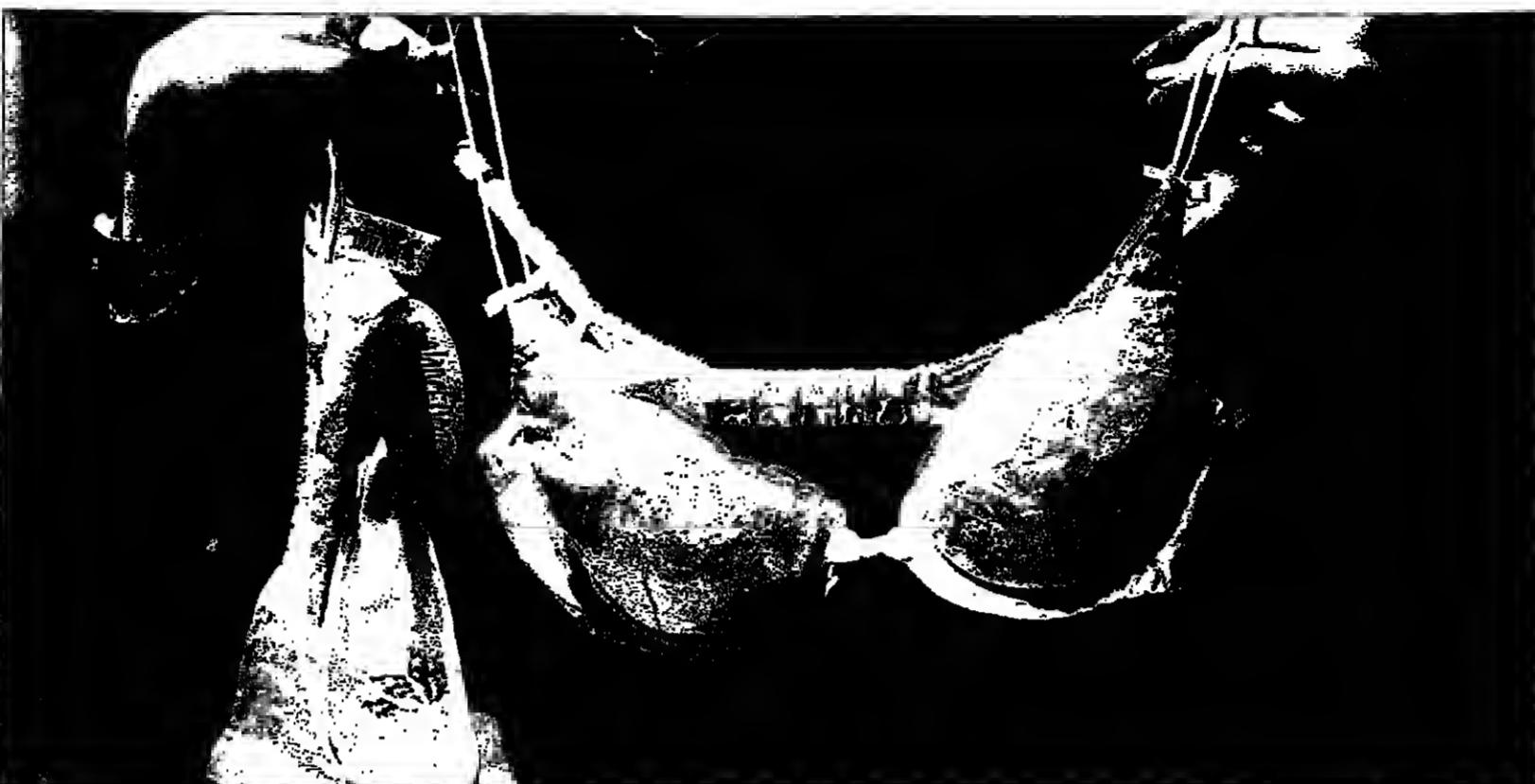
Have you got a receipt?" Of course you haven't got a receipt, it was a present for heaven's sake. You weren't supposed to know that your relationship with your sister-in-law was priced at £4.99. It was a secret between her and her Access card. You know now, though, because after smiling and saying thank you you put it in your little pile of Things to Go Back. Why can't they just give you a gift token and have done with it? But rather than admit that your tastes are completely unfathomable, your friends and relations will instead gift wrap any old rubbish then hand it to you muttering "It's from Marks so you can always take it back if its too big/small/ mumsy". Those few words are fated to take hours off your life as you wait for your refund at what is laughingly known as Customer Services.

known as Customer Services. It's not their fault. The length of the queue is a reflection on neither their merchandise nor their staffing levels but on our abject failure to make simple choices between one product and the next. Some companies actively encourage customers to bring things back. The Books Etc chain ran an ad campaign based on its willingness to take back any book you didn't enjoy. Either the British public is very easily pleased, or it is happily furnishing its rooms with half-read books, because it appears to have passed up this invitation to use them as a lending library: as a bemused spokesperson puts it "there was remarkably little take-up on the money back guarantee". With one predictable stir-fried exception. Delia. Delia Smith's latest has been flooding back into the shops. "One poor woman had been given four copies" explain Waterstones.

waterstones.

That's Christmas for you. But there is another breed of shopper whose spells at the returns counter are not confined to the post-Christmas rush. Spot her every morning in the big stores bringing back bangles — and woe betide anyone who tries to stop her. This particular madam spends half her time bummung and hahing over the stock and the other half effing and blind-

the other hand being more



Many unhappy returns for Janet Reger: a flood of old ladies come in after Christmas wailing 'He still thinks I'm a 32B'

Photograph: Kalpesh Lathigra

ing over the counter when she returns her carefully selected purchase. For her, the returning habit means she can spend twice as long at the shops at no cost to herself. The returns racket reaches epic proportions with the wedding list market. Unscrupulous fiancés have been known to pen an extensive list then exchange the whole silver-

the exchange the whole silver-plated lot for hard cash.

The whole business of returning perfectly sound merchandise on the grounds of unsuitability has its roots in a school of retailing that went out with the eighteen hour girdle. Until frighteningly recently smart London shops were still supplying goods "on approval". Rather than trying on clothes in the shop like normal people, the rich would send a flunkey to collect boxes of the latest gear to try on at home — a sort of up-market version of mail order. The next trick would be to return the lot saying that none of it was "suitable". The late Lady Rothermere was notorious for taking

goods (usually capacious shawls) on approval then sending the chauffeur back with them. Bubbles sometimes tried it on in every sense as she was often spotted wearing the "unsuitable" garments in the society pages.

This kind of behaviour is now commonplace. Everyone, it seems, shops in haste and returns at leisure. But never more so than after Christmas. January is the cruellest month for the retailers. Not only do they have to mark down all their unsold goods and cope with the rush of sale shoppers, they also have a stream of dissatisfied customers coming in clutching a partially-wrapped object that some well-meaning person has used as a token present. The male human's failure to learn from experience is demonstrated anew each January when hordes of plump and disappointed

of plump and disappointed women trudge into Knickerbox with their tales of woe.

"Men never really buy the right underwear for women" explains Mrs Box. Furthermore,

remember that spatial awareness thing that males are supposed to be so much better at? If they're so good at judging size by eye how do you explain the cup sizes they come up with? (This may also explain why they always seem to buy the wrong amount of emulsion). "They want to compliment the woman so they buy a smaller size which then only makes her feel worse". And

only makes her feel worse. And what is it about men and red underwear? "We get a lot of red satin coming back. The guys might like it but the girls bring it back and exchange it for white cotton."

WHO'S RETURNING WHAT AT M&S?

Pam Poole, 50, Educational Assistant
I'm returning a jogging top, which was too short and I felt uncomfortable in it. I bought the bottoms with it, but they were fine. I've also got this polyester top which is just too tight across the back, so I want a refund on it.

Ros Morris, 32, Housewife
I'm bringing back one of their teddy bears; I'm sorry, but I think it's ugly. It was a Christmas present, but I think it's got a horrible face, and I'm not having it. I've got the receipt so I'll have the money instead.

Peter Cole, 42, Property Officer
My wife bought me some chino trousers before Christmas, which have a mark on the leg, so I want to change them. I didn't notice it in the shop, but I'm sure it's not my fault.

Angela Baldwin, 42, Bank Clerk
got this underwear set for
Christmas, which I'm bringing
back because I just don't like
it; it's not really what I go for. I
also bought myself a jumper
which I want to change for the
smaller size.

Jan Date, 46, Secretary
I'm bringing back this dress, which I didn't try on in the shop because there was too big a queue for the changing room. I didn't think it suited me when I tried it, so I'm

Eric Holt, 70, Pensioner
My daughter bought me a pair of trousers for Christmas which I didn't really like. She said she wouldn't be offended if I wanted to change them for another pair and was happy to give me the receipt.

Interviews by Scott Hughes

Serena Mackesy

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CHV 1996

arts

Oves?

Hello? Cher? Whitney? Oh, Emma, hi

Top Hollywood agent Nicole David wants the very best for her clients. And she won't get off the phone until she's got it.

By Daniel Jeffreys
Photograph by Richard Poley



It's 8am on a sunny California morning and Nicole David is on the phone. She's almost always on the phone. "Can you get me Cher and then call New York about Whitney," she says, guiding her \$100,000 Mercedes through LA traffic with one hand. "Then I need to talk with Gene about the scripts," David has already been on the air since 5.45am.

As she drives, the LA landscape slips by. Beverly Drive turns into Rodeo and then Wilshire Boulevard. Everything is movie-clean, especially the sleek building that houses the prestigious William Morris Agency on El Camino, just behind the Beverly Wilshire Hotel where Julia Roberts played Pretty Woman to Richard Gere's lost soul.

Roberts and Gere are not represented by David, but if they were they'd be keeping pretty good company. As a senior agent at the William Morris Agency she now has charge of a powerhouse client list – including Emma Thompson, Whitney Houston, Cher, Patrick Swayze, Roseanne and John Travolta. Nicole David is hot. A five-foot bundle of energy with a laughing smile, she is one of Hollywood's most powerful citizens.

On this sunny morning David has a problem. It goes with the territory. A hot young actress has got pregnant, just as her career was about to take off. Nicole can't get the starlet to come to the telephone, a most unusual occurrence. It seems the woman's boyfriend is screening all calls.

"I can't understand why some women allow a man to take over their careers but I've had this before, a client getting pregnant because she won't face up to the issues in her life. The last time it happened it was more difficult – the actress had just been nominated for an Oscar."

When I next see David she is running around a New York hotel room explaining her relationship with her clients ("I think you have to be in love with them, just a little and they will give you some of that back") before attending the premiere of *Waiting to Exhale*, which stars client Whitney Houston. She spends about a quarter of her year in New York and that means many

hours in airplanes. ("I get tired," she says, "but that would never make me give up. The only time I think of quitting is when all the game-playing gets to me. A year ago I couldn't get calls returned on John Travolta. Now everybody wants him. John hasn't changed. He was and is a fine actor. That makes me a little sick.")

As the premiere time approaches, she's a little nervous. *People* magazine and *Entertainment Weekly* both have Houston front covers with negative articles inside. "The relationship with the client is like parenting," she says. "When this kind of shit happens it is upsetting. I know the person is not like this and I'll have to work with her so she doesn't take it too personally."

The telephone rings: Emma Thompson's on the line. David lowers her voice and a hushed conversation takes place. Thompson is a platinum property now and so David has a tricky problem. There are hundreds of projects on offer but she must choose which one will best allow Thompson to capitalise on her success.

"My job is to help the client understand their ambition," says David.

"These are amazingly talented people but some can't define their dreams, others can get that far but then can't make the right decisions to get to the next stage."

David never stops. In New York, she makes calls constantly as we talk until it's time to meet another William Morris agent in the bar along with Deborah, Chase, who runs Whitney Houston's production company. The three will go to Whitney's penthouse together and plenty of business will be done through the evening. She's permanently on call for a client list that spans many time zones of potential trouble; David's weekends are spent watching movies and reading scripts.

At 11am on a Monday she's trying to make her reading beat fruit. New York has been closed by a blizzard so she has a little more time for problem-solving. She is discussing two young stars with a female colleague in Manhattan; both are at a delicate moment in their careers. "That would be just the

wrong project," she says, referring to one script on her list. "We have to find something that makes everyone aware how he's developed. I have no problem slashing his price to smithereens if it means he can do something hip."

The conversation is three-way. David to New York from LA and, in her office, an assistant listens to every word, a special device on the phone silencing his mouthpiece. As they work the list, Steve signals and offers advice. His job is to have on hand all the information David could ever need as she works without pause. Outside the door there's Cat Carter, the other assistant who is planning David's schedule for months ahead.

"So you got an offer for \$1m?" she asks of New York. "Is that firm?" The answer is vague. "Get a clear fix on that, we can't do anything unless it's a firm offer." Which they often aren't. This being Hollywood, there are lots of variables and this million-dollar deal is dependent on the choice of director. In Beverly Hills speak that's not a "real" deal.

They move on, covering a list of over 50 potential movies. Struggling screenwriters should be allowed to sit in on the process. They'd find it's not enough to write a good script. The "project" has to surface when the right actors, directors and producers are in place to do the work. As David rejects script after script, she says many are great projects, they just don't match what the market and the clients need right now.

Back in the car and the telephone's glued to her ear. "When will Penny Marshall start to shoot? I know it was supposed to be today but there's too much snow." She makes a left-turn. "Anyway, I want flowers from us to Penny and I want flowers sent from Whitney to Denzel Washington." The film is *The Preacher's Wife* starring Washington and Houston, directed by Marshall. David wants the relationship between all parties to start and finish in good shape. Attention to detail. It's the first rule of agency work.

David admits that the personal lives of the stars can become a big issue. "I am in love with my client's work, not

them. I try to keep my distance from their private dramas but I'm right in there when a relationship makes an actor late for the set or makes him miss a casting call." Back in her office, she has to sort out a director who has rejected a client because he missed an audition. The excuse offered of a bad cold satisfies neither David nor the director but she does her best.

"If somebody is determined to fuck up I can't stop that," she says. "Actors are responsible for their own destiny. You can work as hard as anything but you can't prevent failure."

Riding success is a different question and David is now trying to repeat last year's golden harvest. Clients John Travolta, Emma Thompson and Patrick Swayze have all been nominated for prestigious Golden Globe Awards, which some say are Hollywood's "up-market Oscars". This presents its own problems. "If they all win, who the hell am I going to sit next to?" quips David, but the trickier question is which project each should accept next.

"It's all a question of how best to position the client to best realise their ambitions, give what we know about their talents." As she says this she tosses a script directed at Patrick Swayze into the waste basket. "That would be no good. It's exactly the kind of piece of shit which would really hurt him."

Emma Thompson poses fewer problems. If all goes well, her next project is fixed, so long as David can get Thompson to read the script. "She's resuming now and hard to get hold of and she needs that but it's slowing something down. I just tell people they have to be understanding."

The success of David's list brings enormous power. She can influence how a script is written and she has often requested a movie be changed when she believes it did not do her client justice. That's why she goes to so many screenings and reads so many scripts. "I like to put out fires before they start," she says.

The agency business involves big money. The William Morris Agency, now ranked number two and climbing, is a private company. Sources say its

clients generated \$2bn dollars last year and at a standard agent's fee of 10 per cent William Morris would have earned \$200 million. But Hollywood is no longer that simple. With complex front-end and back-end deals, it's hard to judge what the agency makes. Informed experts say William Morris will probably bank over £275m for 1995.

The pressure is on for the agents to win, promote and keep clients. But not at any cost. "This is not a bad script," she says to one client on the telephone.

"But the negative for me is the director and I say that even though he's one of our clients." With a flick of the wrist another script becomes bin-lining.

With her assistants, David goes back

to working her "list", the three-page collection of telephone calls she just has to make so that Tinsel Town can build more fantasies and make more money. "Look," she says speaking for one client. "I don't think you making an offer of \$5 million will move her. That alone won't get her attention and make her read the script. I don't need you to make an offer. What I need is for you to get a great director involved."

In one hour, David rebuffs a £5m offer, insists that a client gets to approve script and leading man, demands £6m for another client, rejects eight projects and gets on the case of a client who is causing problems. "She's way too self-involved which is not interesting," she insists down the phone. "She needs to get passionate about something. She's not another Emma Thompson so she needs to develop some other strengths."

David is now 54 and has been in the business all her working life. A high school drop-out, born in Canada, she began her career as an actress, appearing in *The Trouble with Girls* starring Elvis Presley. In Los Angeles, David met Arnold Rifkind, who was working as a shoe salesman. Combining her understanding of actors and his sharp business mind they formed a small talent agency; a series of smart moves brought them to the Triad agency, which William Morris bought three years ago. Both are now rich (Rifkind

is now the worldwide head of the agency's motion picture department and holds court on the floor above David). David is married to a successful defence attorney-turned-songwriter. She has no children. "I thought about having them for exactly one hour and that was just because the guy was so cute. I would not be good at having kids and I know having them would make me a worse agent. But the quality of mothering is used in every aspect of my work."

Arnold Rifkind agrees and says

that's a key strength of David. "Men can identify types, like 'Steve Italian' or 'Rugged American' but they tend to ignore the less obvious. Instead of asking 'What do the studios or networks want?' women spend time developing their clients' careers from the inside out. It's a great skill and Nicole is the master practitioner. In this business you are only as good as the people you represent and Nicole has made her people so much better by giving them somebody to trust."

Rifkind believes that David will be impossible to replace, if she ever retires. "When we met, Nicole really had nothing that would qualify her as an agent but then the industry was smaller, you could start something and make it succeed. Now with the dominance of big agencies there's a tendency to play safe, so the next generation of agents will be lawyers."

Back in the car heading for Sushi in Santa Monica, David has barely pulled away before calling her assistants so they can connect her to the constellation of talent. "Close your ears," she says. "I have to tell a client he didn't get a part. It could get ugly." The calls continue all the way to the restaurant. By the time we arrive the client has been let down lightly and a new movie has been put into development. Not a bad day's work: it took 20 minutes.

As the Mercedes is valet-parked David grows philosophical. "Some people, like Arnold, they love chasing the deal. For me that is nowhere near the satisfaction of making a fantasy come true. After all, that's why they built this town – so crazy people would have a place to realize their dreams."



Mr Motivator is there. How exactly does he plan to lead us into the 21st century?

A walk into the grand opening of the "Leaders Into the 21st Century" photography exhibition at the Mall Galleries. I glance behind me and see Mr Motivator, GMTV's workout king, chatting away with June Whitfield over a glass of champagne. How sweet, I think, for them to be here with the rest of us to salute those who will guide our nation into the Millennium. And then I realise the truth: Mr Motivator, and the such, are *part of the exhibition, too*. They are, as far as Charles Green, the photographer, is concerned, our exemplary leaders as well. Yes, the list is diverse and very weird: Professor

Stephen Hawking and Faith Brown, John Major and Flawella Benjamin (*Play Away*). "How do you intend to lead us into the year 2001?" I ask Flawella. "Well," she replies, "With a smile." "I must admit that I am very surprised to be included," confesses Jack Tinker, the *Daily Mail's* theatre critic. "Well," I say, "You are the *Daily Mail's* leading theatre critic." "Yes," he says, merrily. "That's very kind of you to say so. Yes. Thank you." "Look," I say, "There's Betty Boothroyd talking to Bob Holness." "I know," replies one of Mr Motivator's

party. "How the hell did he make it to the exhibition?" "Well," I say. "He was the first James Bond." "It's true," says Bob Holness. "I was the very first James Bond." On the radio, 1958. I did *Moonwalker*. *Bar* before Sean Cooney. Shhh. Here comes the speeches. "Well," says the man from Kodak, the sponsor. "Kodak are proud to sponsor such a marvellous event, for we are leaders, too. Market leaders, leading you into the 21st century. Thank you very much." There is applause. "Well," says Charles Green, the pho-

tographer, "I'd like to thank Kodak and just say that Kodak Gold is the Rolls-Royce of camera film. And I'd just like to say one thing to Baroness Thatcher. I know why you've decided to make your big speech tonight at the Keith Joseph memorial lecture. It's sour grapes because you weren't asked to be in the exhibition!" Mr Motivator, Flawella Benjamin and June Whitfield all applaud.

"Well," says the lady from the Haver-

sham Trust for people with learning difficulties. "I'd just like to say one thing to all the famous people here today. Please come and visit us at our residential unit. Our patients watch TV all the time and they love *absolutely everyone* on it." There is applause. "Order, order," says Betty Boothroyd. "I now declare this exhibition open!" There is applause. Suddenly the doors are flung open and a saintly – eerily familiar – sight wanders inwards. When I first see her, I think, a little oddly: "My God. It's my mother." But it isn't my mother. It is a celebrity who transcends celebrity. It is a woman who is so much a part of all our lives that it is almost like seeing ourselves wander into the party. It is Esther.

There is a hush. The cameraman from Channel One turns, as if hypnotised, to film her, but gets so close that he knocks Desmond Wilcox's glasses right off his face with his camera lead and they fly down the stairs. Esther grins graciously and puts down her handbag to help retrieve the glasses. The photographer from the *Evening Standard* rushes forward to get a picture and accidentally kicks Esther's bag, sending her private things flying across the carpet. Well all watch, mesmerised. Esther looks down and looks up at us all. It is as if time has frozen. Then she smiles, graciously, and makes her way into the crowd.

reviews

TELEVISION
999 Special (BBC1)

Unwatchable without brandy, a catheter and a coathanger, says Jasper Rees

Most of the 999's reconstructions can be survived with a box of tissues, suitable for mopping up sweat, tears and, in those scenes involving heights, blood. But this solitary prop would have been pitifully inadequate for the latest 999 Special. No viewer would have got through it without a makeshift survival kit consisting of a generous measure of brandy, a catheter and a coathanger.

By a bizarre coincidence these were precisely the tools used in this week's life-saving mission, in which Professor Angus Wallace operated mid-flight on Paula Dixon, whose lung was punctured by a broken rib in a motorcycle accident just before she boarded a plane from Hong Kong to London. The professor used the brandy to sterilise the coathanger wire, which he inserted inside the catheter to guide it into the patient's chest and drain it of air.

The viewer, however, put the kit to more conventional use. The brandy performed its traditional role. The catheter allowed you to stay put during a programme that made fierce demands on the bladder. And the coathanger was just the thing for hanging up your preconceptions about a morally shabby programme.

As soon as the tale of Professor Wallace's extraordinary operation circulated the global newsroom, the team from 999 must have known this was the big one. It was a tough reconstruction, but performable. No previous rescue story can have been so well-documented, but then no other tellers of the tale had Michael Buerk on board. They flew him straight out to Honkers and converted him into a kind of Sophoclean chorus who commented on the narrative as it unfolded next to him. He even handed over the newspaper that Wallace used to pad the patient's arm splinter.

The participants, meanwhile, were doing their bit to compress, shape and tidy up a drama that, as real life can be, was just that little bit messy. "My name's Angus," said the helpful Prof, giving an otherwise realistic performance as himself, to his neighbour on the plane. Meanwhile, Paula found that her scheduled flight had no more smoking seats. It's not entirely likely she uttered the prophecy, "I'll never survive that." Still, a rare case of Smoking Saves Lives.

Operation Coathanger is such an extraordinary story that no amount of heavy-handedness could ruin it. Even the actress playing Paula for the operation gave a much more resonant performance than 999 usually delivers. Was that her chest wall you saw the scissors penetrating? If so, no wonder Paula chose not to portray herself.

Paula still has a phobia about coathangers, though otherwise she seems to have got off scot-free. When she flogged her story to a tabloid, it was because: "This was my best way of saying thank you. As well as me making a little bit of money." Thought not necessarily in that order. "I love them all," she said of her saviours, and ducked out of shot in a sudden attack of the sobs as the camera faded, the credits rolled and an invisible caption scrolled across the screen: made you cry.

OPERA The Makropulos Case, Metropolitan Opera, NY

It couldn't have got off to a worse start: delayed first by the death of a tenor and then by a snowstorm. But when Janacek's opera finally opened, it found Jessye Norman on top form. By David Patrick Stearns



Jessye Norman: glamorous, but still able to convey Emilia Marty's emotional weariness

Photograph: Winnie Klotz / Metropolitan Opera

Even before its debut production at the Metropolitan Opera, Janacek's *The Makropulos Case* had an air of evil luck: at the performances on 5 January, the tenor Richard Versalles, singing the role of Vitek, dropped dead from a heart attack in the first scene, prompting immediate cancellation. The 8 January performance was cancelled by the worst snowstorm to hit New York in 48 years. Some viewers refused to return on 10 January. "Are you kidding?" one superstitious critic told me. "I wouldn't go near that place."

Such sentiments – which weren't isolated – indicated how Versalles's public death was profoundly disquieting, breaking the theatre's "fourth wall" with an unexpected confrontation with one's own mortality. That's ironic considering it's an opera that tells us to welcome and enjoy mortality. Its central character – diva Emilia Marty – has been denied death by an arcane formula that's kept her alive for three centuries. The result is a person who lives with nearly unimaginable levels of cynicism, loneliness and impatience. Janacek characterised such emotional states vividly with a score full of his characteristically feverish ejaculations of rhythm, shorn of the ingratiating folk influences found in other operas and deployed with a swiftness that allows the piece to approximate the speed of spoken theatre.

It's tough on all fronts, though Elijah Moshinsky's production brilliantly established a believable context for this odd plot by treating it as a *film noir* with stylish but chilly sets designed by Anthony Ward, clearly inspired by vintage Fritz Lang movies. Marty begins as a familiar film type – a flamboyant woman of mystery, moving with feline grace, wearing leopard-skin gloves and maintaining inscrutability behind sunglasses. When Marty

confesses her past in the final scene and chooses death over another dose of the formula, the production becomes fussy. Moshinsky tried to give it a *Don Giovanni* style, ending with an enlarged rendering of the formula going up in flames around Marty. It seemed contrived and clumsy.

Musically, there were a number of clumsy moments as well. Though conductor David Robertson etched long musical arcs, the Met orchestra lacked a sense of authority. Even in a singable English translation, the score sat uneasily on the non-Czech cast, though there were successes where one would least expect them. The great Wagnerian character tenor Graham Clark (as Albert Gregor) was the only one who really cracked it, though Donald McIntyre, a seasoned Wotan, came close with his superbly enunciated characterisation of Dr Kolenay.

The role of Marty reportedly caused Jessye Norman much anxiety, which is understandable considering that her large, lyrical voice just wasn't built to sing Janacek's rhythm and much of Act I lies in the weakest part of her voice. Still, she had some fine musical moments in her final confession. And even if she's too ladylike to swill whiskey convincingly, it was one of her most effective acting efforts. Though she could hardly look more glamorous and delivered the character's arrogance with good, bitchy humour, Norman showed the character's emotional weariness and physical frailty from the earliest scenes. That made Marty more integrated, intriguing and human – a remarkable feat for a character based on a superhuman idea.

Details: 001-212-362 6000

THEATRE

Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions
Paul Taylor goes for a quiet evening out at the Islington Old Red Lion

Just opened at the Old Red Lion, a double-bill cryptically entitled *Erections Ejaculations Exhibitions* and *The Suck Machine*. As we reviewers often say: even if you don't have a child to take along, just go. Only kidding. On the other hand, I'd be loath to describe this unsurprisingly packed-out production by Canada's Way Off Broadway Theatre Company as an entirely adult entertainment. "Graphic images of sex... but no actual sex", commented a man perusing the poster on the way in. "Images of sex, sex – amounts to the same thing these days," was his friend's rueful reply. It proved to be one of the evening's wittier and more up-to-date remarks.

Adapted from the writings of the (dead) Beat poet Charles Bukowski, the show starts off with a frank look at the ups and mostly downs of the relationship between Harry (superb Michael Schademoose) and Connie (Deb Pickman), a couple of alcohol-abusing losers. "Ya no, I do well on the sex quizzes," is gravel-voiced Harry's chat-up line in the nervy seduction scene. He shows her a Polaroid of an ejaculating penis and, when she's encouraged to evade sufficient wonder at it, he solemnly admits it's his.

Things start to get vicious when Harry emerges as a greenhorn in the cunnilingus department. He contemplates the task with the strained expression of a man who, having just lost his dentures, is then confronted with an ducking-for-apples contest. A man's dream, he confides, "is a whore with a gold tooth and a garter belt" who is prepared to do the dishes and only stay a week. Precariously balanced between being an indulgence and a critique of that attitude, *Erections* shows Harry eventually shacking up with a department-store mannequin, just as the second scene climaxes, so to speak, as two violent hobos resort to the eponymous machine on the grounds that, with it, there's "no cortex, no shit, no arguments".

The in-your-face intensity and comic flair of the acting and of Michael Werner's production goes some way towards compensating for the depressingly conventional underlying thought. The seedy mosaic of murder-rape-and-necrophilia fantasies in the second half does, however, provoke one or two intriguing perceptions. There's a scene in which a down-and-out wino is forced by his criminal sidekick to "prove that he's a man" by forcing another man to give him oral sex. A paradoxical proof, I'd have thought. A woman is, in some senses, lucky she doesn't have equivalent equipment whereby she can "prove she's a woman" – but then, when you change the gender in that phrase, its inherent absurdity is quickly exposed.

The show won't win many fans for Bukowski's verbal skills. There's the odd bit of dexterity, as in the anaphoric exchange in the first piece that plays around with various meanings of "feeling like": "I feel like we ought to pay the rent"; "I feel like going on for ever"; "I feel like you could" etc. Indeed, it sometimes feels like they could.

Booking: 0171-837 7816. To 10 Feb

EXIT POLL Seven

Critics have raved about it: Sheila Johnston thought it would be in her 1996 top 10. But what do cinema-goers make of the serial-killer death-fest?

CYNTHIA MURRAY, 29, ADVERTISING REP
I wouldn't normally come to this kind of thing: I tend to stay away from these gruesome films. I suppose I only came because Brad Pitt was in it, but it really is amazing, and he's proved himself a good actor.

BRIAN HOLMES, 35, RETAIL MANAGER
It really takes you over; towards the end you're gripping the armrests and shrinking back in your seat. It's rare to see something that absorbing; yes, it's a fantastic film.

MARK DEERING, 27, INVESTMENT BANKER
It's got to be the best film I've seen in a long time, probably because it's genuinely shocking. This type of thing's usually so predictable, but you never quite know where this is going to go. They end it brilliantly.

PRIYA GUWALI, 20, STUDENT
Despite all the unpleasantness, it was terrific. I thought it was a really dark, bleak film, though it has just enough touches of humour to get you through the gloom.

CAROLINE LAPPER, 22, NURSERY NURSE
The tension's almost unbearable. It's really clever the way it just shows you bits and pieces – photos and stuff – and you end up wanting to see more, even though it's all really grim. I suppose that's what makes it so good.

MICHAEL BALFORD, 39, CIVIL ENGINEER
I really liked it, and I'm pleased because it's been so hyped up. I thought I might be disappointed, because you so often are with these things, but it turned out to be fantastic. Genuinely worth seeing.

MARIA HURST, 28, SALES ASSISTANT
I'm quite shaken up, actually: it's all rather stomach-churning, but you can't help but be impressed by it. I came with my boyfriend, and I suppose it's not really a "date" film, but, yes, it's very, very good, even if you tend to feel queasy in parts.

SEAN BECKETT, 23, ACCOUNTS CLERK
The best thing is that it never cops out. It goes for the downbeat option all the way, and it works. It has to be one of the most gruesome films I've ever seen, and that's not a criticism.

AARON MASTERS, 21, STUDENT
It's great, and it seems to have everything: good story, character, dialogue, music. It's most effective in the parts where they're finding the bodies, and the camera's searching frantically around; you're wondering what exactly they're going to find. It's nasty, but it's all brilliantly done.

GEOFF WRAY, 41, PLUMBER
It's hard to sum it all up, really: it just gets to you. I think I need a drink now. It's not because it's gory – actually they don't always show you

that much – so I suppose it's more to do with the way they tell the story. And it's a good story.

ELAINE MACDONALD, 32, WORKS FOR A PUBLISHING COMPANY
Morgan Freeman's always excellent, and I suppose it's the best thing Brad Pitt's done. It all looks really good, too: all the rain and the grime really adds to the whole effect. All rather dark and depressing, maybe, but I guess that's the intention.

Interviews by Scott Hughes

THE PEARL FISHERS

One beautiful melody after another... rare and hypnotic opera magic... A luscious Arabian nights' fantasy...
BIZET

January 17, 25, 27
February 1, 7, 9, 13, 16, 21 at 7.30pm
February 3 at 6.30pm
Tickets from £30
Box Office 0171-632 8300
24 hours
Coproduced with Opera North



overview

JM Barrie's classic, usually wheeled out with a superannuated actress in tights, in a new production by Matthew Warchus, designed by Rob Howell and starring John Padden.

At the West Yorkshire Playhouse (0113-244 2111) until 3 Feb.

THE FILM SHOWGIRLS

Joe Eszterhas became Hollywood's highest-paid scriptwriter with X-rated tale of Nom; a lap-dancer who dreams of timeless success without sacrificing integrity. Of course.

Adam Mars-Jones voted it worse than the same team's *Basic Instinct*: "All About Eve remade by Paul Raymond". "Peppered with lines you cannot believe survived the newspaper basket... scrapes bottom in all senses," gasped the *FT*. "A miserable folly," groaned the *Times*. "Dismal," concluded the *Telegraph*. "Most depressing film of the year, and it's only January," opined *Time Out*.

At a cinema near you... but not for long.
The poster is clever, if tawdry. The film? Merely tawdry. What is Kyle McLachlan doing in it? Answers on a postcard.

THE CONCERT JOAN RODGERS

The penultimate pair of concerts in the Wigmore Hall's mammoth The British Series included his Pushkin setting *The Poet's Echo*, sung by Joan Rodgers.

Anthony Payne was utterly convinced. "Joan Rodgers' interpretive subtleties are perfectly matched at the keyboard... an evening for both artists to recall with satisfaction." A "recital of untelling interest and reward" agreed the *Guardian*. "A sophisticated, highly intelligent, flawlessly artistic presentation" eulogised the *Times*.

Hot young talent Ian Bostridge sings the final concert in the Wigmore Hall British series (0171-935 2141) on 24 Jan.

on view

An accompanying child is not a necessary requirement for this excellent piece of theatre. Children will, however, love it.

The poster is clever, if tawdry. The film? Merely tawdry. What is Kyle McLachlan doing in it? Answers on a postcard.

Another triumph for London's finest concert hall. If you've never been, check it out immediately.

JAN 13 1996

books

THEATRE

A black hole in fiction

When space exploration is in the ascendant, science fiction takes a dive (and vice versa). Now after 'Apollo 13', the ultimate real-life space drama, how do the writers fight back? By John Gribbin



When there is a wave of activity among the writers of space fiction, you can be sure of one thing—the real manned space programme is in trouble, or at least suffering a hiatus. The great days of science fiction were in the Forties and Fifties, with writers such as Robert Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke, the magazine *Astounding*, Dan Dare, and *Journey into Space*. Space was mysterious and exciting, a canvas broad enough to encompass the speculations of even the most vivid imagination. But in the Sixties people actually went into space. By the end of that decade, men had walked on the moon, and, for many, the magic went away.

John Clute, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, has called this intrusion by the real world "the profound tragedy of science fiction". Starting with Sputnik, which smashed the theatre of space, things were never the same again. Many SF readers experienced almost a sense of *déjà vu* when the moon landings actually happened, coupled with a sense of anticlimax. In Britain, in particular, a new kind of science fiction, the "New Wave", was developed by writers such as J. G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock, probing the "inner space" of the mind rather than the outer space of the universe.

The New Wave label was first applied (borrowed from cinema's *nouvelle vague*) in the late Sixties, and the material to which it was applied often had dystopian elements, a disillusion not just with space but with what was happening on Earth as well, that persisted right through the Seventies.

Elsewhere, the backlash against space fiction took different forms. The hugely successful *Star Wars* trilogy, released in the late Seventies and early Eighties, might look superficially like space fiction, but is really just cowboys and Indians in space, mindless entertainment (nothing wrong with that, but if there is one thing good SF is not, it is mindless) that never—unlike, say, *2001: A Space Odyssey*—addresses deep issues.

Of course, there were exceptions to the antipathy about space engendered in many writers by the moon landings. Doris Lessing, for example, says that the Moon still retained its romance for her, in spite of "pompous remarks" about taking a giant leap for mankind. But then, perhaps she is not a typical space fiction writer: "I didn't know I was writing space fiction at all. It never crossed my mind that I was writing space fiction until some magazine said 'she's muscling in on our act'. 'Well, well,' I thought. 'So I'm writing science fiction, am I?'"

The attraction of space for Lessing (who began to muscle in on the act at the end of the Seventies) was, and is, the opportunity to let the imagination roam free, where nobody can say "That creature does not exist," because any creature the writer imagines does exist. But for writers more firmly embedded in the genre, it was when space became unfashionable again that they let loose their imaginations on its rebuilt stage.

It was a combination of this freedom and a deliberate desire to do something different from the New Wave, taking SF back to its roots, that provided the impetus for the best British writer of space fiction today. In the worlds of Iain Banks (or Iain M. Banks, as he signs himself when authoring SF), there are no chains on the imagination.

Deliberately reviving the old idea of Space Opera (the SF equivalent of horse operas, not of Covent Garden), he portrays a future in which Arthur C. Clarke's prediction that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" has come true. Not for him the nitty-gritty of how rockets work, nor any dystopian visions warning us of the error of our ways. Instead, Banks grasps the opportunity to roam the galaxy, using all the special effects of space opera to portray his

own vision of Utopia, the future in which he would like to live.

And all this has been happening, from the mid-Eighties onward, against a real world background of a faltering manned space programme, disillusion with the once mighty Nasa in the wake of the Challenger disaster, and the gloomy analysis that, as of 1990, it would not have been possible to replicate the Sixties feat of putting a man on the moon, and bringing him safely back, before the end of the decade—not so much because we lacked the technology, but because we lacked the political will.

So what do we find Banks and the other writers of space fiction up to? Plugging the gap, of course. As the prospects of a manned expedition to Mars faded into the far distant future, the early Nineties saw a wave of gritty, realistic novels about the colonisation of the Red Planet, with the most gritty and realistic of all the portrayals probably being Ben Bova's *Mars* (1992). Deeper into space, Gregory Benford, a physicist who also writes fiction, has picked up Arthur Clarke's baton, writing about possible futures in which the colonisation of space is carried out by scientifically plausible (although technologically advanced) methods.

All in all, it looks as if we are build-

ing up for a golden age of space fiction. But there's a cloud on the horizon. Disturbingly, for fans of the genre, Nasa seems to be getting its act together again. The combination of man and machine in space that led to the triumphs of the Hubble Space Telescope has raised morale, while the collapse of the Soviet Union has provided a new partner with complementary skills, not least some brute-force hardware for launching massive payloads into space. The international space station looks as if it really will go into orbit, and there is talk once again of an expedition to Mars, if not within my lifetime then perhaps within the lifetimes of many people around today. The success of the film *Apollo 13* is another substantial straw in the wind, as real-life space heroes (more or less) take over from the lantern-jawed space rangers of fiction.

It's obvious what this will mean for science fiction. A retreat from space,

back into the mysteries of the inner mind, while the romance is taken away from the Red Planet, as well as from the moon—and the rest of the universe is tarred with the same brush. Iain M. Banks will start writing introspective psychological studies. Gregory Benford will go back to being a scientist full time, and there will be a new *Star Wars* trilogy. Sometimes, it seems the world would have been a better place if Nasa had never been invented.

But there is a temporary silver lining. There is always a lag between developments in the real world and the response of the writers, and this inertia is still, for now, bringing us the benefits of a new wave of excellent space fictions. Make the most of it, in case the wave is about to break.

John Gribbin is the presenter of "Space Fictions", which begins on BBC Radio 4 this Tuesday at 2 pm.

Bonfire of the Biedermeiers

Robert Winder reads a riches-to-rags tale by the protean creator of Dame Edna Everage

Novelists are often asked, as they tour the bookshops promoting their work, where on earth they come up with their ideas. Most of them shrug modestly and say that there's no simple answer. But Barry Humphries—whose first novel is a mirthless comedy about the marital misadventures of an Australian drag artiste—will hardly be stumped for a reply. The man behind Dame Edna has written a book whose central figure is a cross-dressing comedienne called Mrs Petty, a "puritanical but hilarious housewife". Blimey, readers will mutter—how the heck did he think of that?

Mrs Petty is the stage persona of Derek Pettyfer, and the novel follows his romantic ups and downs. He has a pretty bad time of it: his ex-wife bad-mouths him to a biographer; his new wife has naughty flings with everyone she meets; and his agent has taken him to the cleaners financially. Luckily, none of it is very serious—Humphries has gone for a lampooning style that doesn't ask us to care much what happens. And the emotional drama hides its light under a lavish catalogue of fashionable objets.

"When people have been more than usually disappointing," runs the epigraph, "we turn with an added tenderness to things." Pettyfer has a collector's devotion: whenever he enters his flat he strokes his Piranesi (note the plural); and he also likes—until his vulgar new mother-in-law puts an £85,000 antique into the dishwasher—to fondle his pieces of Roman glass. He is a fastidious

Women in the Background
by Barry Humphries
Heinemann, £14.99

aesthete—quick to sneer at an "overframed" Chagall—who always notices and mocks the pictures on other people's walls. Not all of them can afford Piranesi, the dim fools.

Humphries also surrounds himself with designer accessories—a "magnificent" scarlet Sulka bathrobe, a Paek Philippe watch and a catwalk-full of clothes by Jaeger, Yves St Laurent, Bruce Oldfield, Donna Karan et al. Someone even sports a "top-of-the-range, 18-carat, red enamelled Cartier AIDS awareness ribbon." It's like reading an in-flight magazine. Even the dentist collects Biedermeier and Lalique.

Of course there is a satirical purpose to all this, but even so, Humphries isn't very sarcastic about these perfumed connoisseurs (all of whose scents are named); and he seems happy to scribble up references to London's artsy milieu as if it added glamour to his unhappy story. Pettyfer's flat contains sculpted busts of Melvyn Bragg and Martin Amis. And he can't go into a restaurant without mentioning who else is there ("Derek walked among the tables, saying a word to Alan Bates and another to Peter Hall"); sometimes he even drops the names of absentees: "Derek sat at a corner table ... a table at which he had often observed Sir Harold Pinter and Lady Antonia Fraser." Sir Harold Pinter? Is this all



Humphries: his alter ego spends the book surrounded by designer accessories

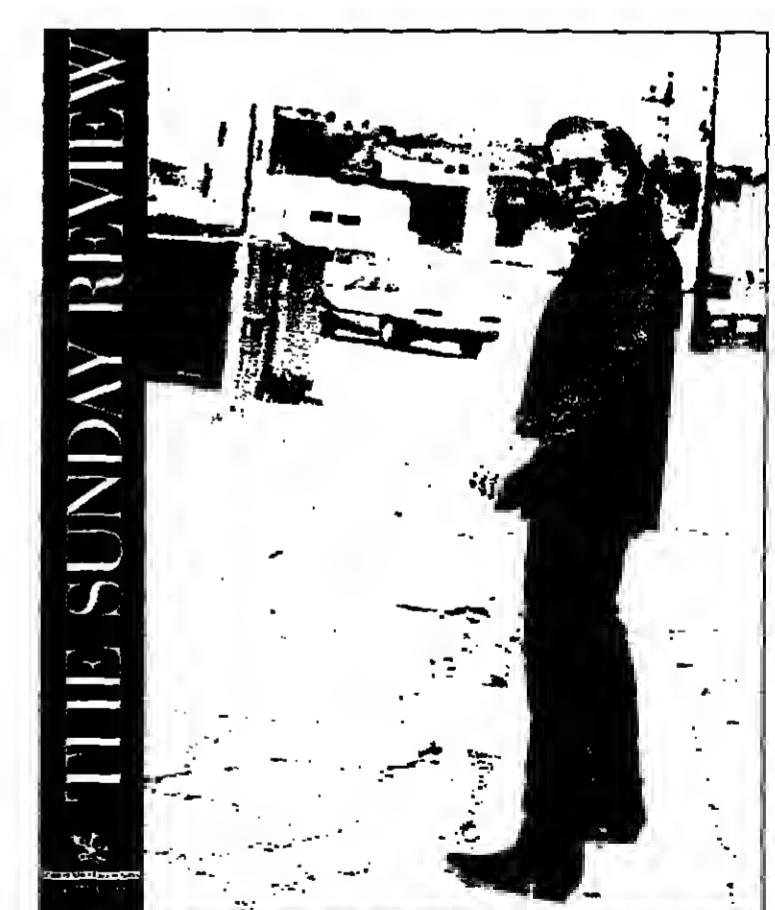
set in the future? The prevailing preoccupation with status symbols is clearly part of the joke, but it's a hard joke to get. In a way, it's quite a cunning parody of your classic bodice-ripper: riches-to-rags instead of rags-to-riches. In place of someone sleeping their way to fame and fortune, we have a celebrity on the skids. But this is no bonfire of

the vanities: the tone of the book, its sarky enthusiasm, is set against this sense of decline. A lot of the time, it looks merely like a record of Pettyfer's conquests in disguise. If he invites a receptionist to lunch at the Ivy, the odds are that she'll bring along some slinky leather-and-chrome harness for afters.

At the emotional climax, when Pettyfer returns from an advertising shoot in Antigua to find that his wife has been pursuing three dangerous liaisons, he realises that he cares more about the decor of his flat: "Reluctantly Derek brought himself to acknowledge the most painful bereavement of all. Alas, the above horrors would appal him far less than were he to discover that Pam had installed strip lighting in his house or resurfaced the floor with black Pirelli rubber."

It isn't that this is unkind; rather, the satire doesn't cut deep enough. Greedy vacuous types are presented as greedy and vacuous, and the result is a flattened-out, catch-all sneer at the vulgarity of life in the fast lane. Still, there is a sweet ending.

Long ago, Pettyfer's first and true love has given him a book about Piranesi as a parting gift. It was a perfect present, but he has never got over the absence of anything like a farewell endearment to go with it. Now, years later, someone returns the book, and out flutters a card saying: "With all my love, Yvette." It's not much (indeed, it's barely plausible), but it hints at a deep emotional logic that is never pressed. A properly broken heart, after all, can never be fixed.



Still crazy after all these years... With *Leaving Las Vegas* poised to sweep the board at the Oscars, Nicolas Cage talks to David Thomson about the demons that drive him

Plus: Geraldine Bedell on an East End morality tale of race and violence

And how to win the holiday of a lifetime in South Africa

IN TOMORROW'S INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

books

All you need to know about the books you meant to read

by Gavin Griffiths

This week:

A HOUSE AND ITS HEAD (1935)
by Ivy Compton-Burnett

Ivy Compton-Burnett produced 19 novels between 1925 and 1969; ingeniously funny, they are written almost entirely in pungent, aphoristic dialogue and detail the struggle for power within extended families. Plots are melodramatic - adultery and incest lurk behind the mannered exchanges.

Plot: Duncan Edgeworth uses avarice to bully his family. His wife, Ellen, tries to placate him: Sybil, the younger daughter, flatters him: only Nance, the elder daughter, balks at his tyranny. Duncan's nephew, Grant, stands to inherit the estate. Within the opening chapters, Duncan harasses his wife to death. Showing little remorse, he visits his rich sister to "recuperate". The family have scant time to celebrate before he returns with a new wife, Alison, who is young and beautiful.

Alison is swiftly bored by Duncan's petulance. She is seduced by the nephew, Grant, and gives birth to his child. Sybil informs her father that the boy is Grant's. Duncan divorces Alison but informs Grant that the boy will inherit. Grant marries Sybil. Peeved at losing out on the house and the money, Sybil arranges for Grant's bastard son to be gassed in an "accident". Grant guesses the truth and banishes Sybil. Duncan remains in the dark.

Sybil goes to live with her rich aunt. Duncan marries the long-suffering governess who promptly becomes pregnant. However, Sybil is no longer concerned about heirs because the aunt dies, leaving her a packet. Only if she can return to the family will she share her fortune. Grant agrees. Blackmail and infanticide forgotten, Sybil is welcomed back into the collective bosom and normal relations are resumed.

Theme: The abuse of power. Characters with money/status/sex appeal baffle those who lack all three; but the underdogs have the verbal dexterity to outfox their tyrants and assert some independence. The half Edwardian setting is a laboratory to demonstrate that family life exists well outside the moral boundaries of respectable society.

Style: Dialogue is pervasive. Chat is both awkward and sinuous, the language abstract yet mercilessly precise. The dearth of visual imagery highlights the maddening clash of voices.

Chief strengths: The characters lack "internal" lives but are compelled to articulate their desires and frustrations. Human personality is shown as the sum total of what you see and hear.

Chief weakness: Kingsley Amis pointed out that a Compton-Burnett character could never say, "You bore me." or "What a pretty dress".

What they thought of it then: The book reinforced Compton-Burnett's status as a major novelist. Virginia Woolf admired and feared "the bitter truth and intense originality" of the work. Later, Nathalie Sarraute welcomed Compton-Burnett's post-modernist challenge to the interior monologues of Joyce and Proust.

What we think of it now: Patronised as an ailing relative of Jane Austen and Henry James. Despite Hilary Spurling's intelligent biography, Compton-Burnett is a victim of senseless literary fashion. At the moment, *A House and Its Head* is out of print.

The hundred and one flirtations

Flamboyant, ambitious and highly-sexed, Dodie Smith was more than just a shopgirl turned dog-lover. By Philip Hoare

Dear Dodie

by Valerie Grove
Chatto, £26

From the beginning, Valerie Grove's book delights with detail. Dodie Smith's Manchester childhood is replete with eccentric bachelor uncles and aunts, and a grandmother who publishes a polemic against "the enforced education of the masses". The background is important, for in her most notably successful play, *Dear Octopus*, Dodie would recreate her family, "that dear octopus from whose tentacles we never quite escape". Throughout her life, Dodie strained between happiness and despair, and her inevitably empathetic biographer states at the outset her subject's early "masochistic tendencies - creating miseries out of unusually happy circumstances".

It was a propensity for self-analysis which would undermine the principal successes of her life. Endlessly documenting her travels in morocco-bound journals, Dodie refused to let things just happen; they needed to be examined under the microscope. "I'm convinced it's hopeless to start out as the heroine of everything one writes," she wrote, but this was indeed the case. And, like her heroines, independence determined Dodie's existence. She represents a particular type of literary woman born in the late 19th or early 20th-century, emancipated by the First World War, vari-talented, vivacious, ambitious and sexually liberated.

Valerie Grove beautifully evokes the period in which her heroine's adventures are set: her provincial experiences in the theatre after Rada, touring towns filled with theatres as yet unconverted to cinemas, with fellow aspiring actresses all named Bunt, Boogie or Boo. The unbeautiful diminutive Dodie stood out, if only for her



eccentric dress, sporting a turban with an 18-inch feather to give her extra height.

Despite, or perhaps because of her plainness, Dodie was determined to take advantage of a newly-permissive era: a series of lieutenants and theatre agents represented a melodrama of her own making, all duly written up in the journals. In such dangerous flirtations, she was "a rather daring adventuress" when feeling good about herself: "a nasty, silly creature" when abashed by how far she would go in search of sensation. Dodie's eventual

episode so surreal that her later friend (and literary executor) Julian Barnes considered using it in a novel, but thought it might be too unbelievable.

Having given up acting, Dodie went to work at Heal's furniture store, where she set her sights on Sir Ambrose Heal himself. She became the boss's mistress, at the same time pursuing a steadier relationship with a fellow assistant, Alec Beesley, with whom she would live for ten years before marrying. It was a flagrantly permissive act as she had meantime become Britain's most successful female play-

wright. The Tyrolean romance of *Autumn Crocus* was rausously received on its first night, and followed by a string of decorously daring dramas, as Dodie was acclaimed as "shopgirl turned playwright". Her dramatic career peaked with the now perennial *Dear Octopus*, but that play's end of an epoch quality signalled a curtain on the inter-war period, and on Dodie's career. In 1939, she decamped to America in deference to Beesley's conscientious objections, and bitterly regretted the move ever after, attributing her subsequent lack of dramatic suc-

cess to having missed wartime Britain and the "copy" it would have furnished.

In Hollywood Dodie made a lot of money out of writing scripts, and became intimate with John van Druten and Christopher Isherwood. Her relationship with these two gay writers is illuminating. Van Druten was an appalling ideologue, stealing unashamedly from Dodie and Isherwood both; she eventually grew tired of his platitudinous ways. Her friendship with Isherwood lasted, despite being endangered by Isherwood's penny-pinching and his boyfriend's greedy consumption at her supper table. Isherwood encouraged Dodie to drop her letter-writing and get on with her first novel, *I Capture the Castle*. Inspired by the lives of the Tenant sisters, Laura and Marget, it was a perfect flight of fancy. Mitfordesque and yet with Joyce and Proust as its "forefathers", the result

Left: Dodie Smith at the window of her Essex cottage after the success of 'The Hundred and One Dalmatians'. Below: a still from the Disney film

of Dodie's desire to become a "serious writer". That desire was superceded by a spotty dog and an inordinate (some would say indecent) love of animals. In 1934, Dodie received a hambox containing a Dalmatian puppy, black and white to match her Heals interior. Pongo proved a photogenic accessory, posing decoratively in the theatre stalls (and one day the seat folded in on the hapless pup).

It is a mark of Grove's good writing that even the most cynical readers will find themselves caught up in the emotional highs and lows of Dodie's doggy obsession. It was the source of the one work for which she will be remembered: *The Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1954) was born out of a remark by an actress friend who thought Dodie's latest puppy "would make a nice fur coat". The novel would keep Dodie in the manner to which she had become accustomed: a scriptwriter friend sent it to Walt Disney, and knowing he would never read the whole book, directed him to the scene in which the fugitive puppies disguise themselves in soot. Disney bought the rights for \$25,000.

The rest is history, though for Dodie, it meant a slow but decorative rural decline in her Essex cottage at Finchingsfield, increasingly cut off from the human world and surrounded instead by dogs, pigeons, feral cats and mice (though she did conceive a late passion for the Beatles' *Sgt Pepper* album). The immortality of her book is confirmed by news that a live action remake of *Dalmatians* is on its way, to the disgust of the British Dalmatian Club who fear that renewed popularity of the breed will weaken its genes. I'm afraid Valerie Grove's utterly delightful book will do the Club no favours, either.



Nazi in a nightdress

The German prima donna was a strategic fan of the Third Reich. Even her salary was arranged by Goebbels. Dermot Clinch investigates

Rarely can so unadventurous an analysis of artistic success have been offered as in the preface to this biography. "Two words" explain the rise of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf to the top of her profession: we are solemnly told. And those words are "talent" and "ambition". Schwarzkopf, 80 last year, "nurtured the seed of talent which had been born in her, willed it to flower through sheer determination, hard work, and sought no alternatives in life except those that would help it bloom even more richly."

It's a fine, floral tribute. The phrase "sought no alternatives", though, smacks of euphemism. Schwarzkopf's talent can be taken for granted; but she wouldn't have got where she did

without being bloody-minded with it. In *Die Fledermaus* in Paris in 1943, Schwarzkopf damaged the scenery with a flying shoe after being demoted to a non-singing role. In Berlin with the Deutsche Oper, the young soprano impressed with her insouciance as much as her voice. "I'm still in my night-dress", came the mid-morning phone-call, as she excused herself from rehearsals. The "night-dress excuse" became something of a joke in Berlin musical life.

For their part, the management of the opera house scrawled "ungrateful" and "lacking in respect" on her official reports.

Even so, Schwarzkopf got ahead. She knew which side her bread was buttered, as Alan Jefferson

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf

by Alan Jefferson
Gollancz, £22.50

who admires his subject, regrettably informs us. In 1935, aged 20, Schwarzkopf enrolled as *Führerin* in the Nazi Students' Association.

In 1939 she became a full member of the Nazi party, swearing on oath that she had no taint of Jewish blood. In 1942, and no doubt well before, she was signing her letters "Heil Hitler!"

The singer's contracts show the President of the Reichsmusikkammer himself, Goebbels, taking personal care of Schwarzkopf's salary. Later Goebbels

employed her as an actress in his film industry, and a carefully vague suggestion hints that their relationship may have been even closer. Certainly Schwarzkopf knew there was shame attached to her past, lying repeatedly about it to the allied authorities.

How handy it is to have friends in high places is a theme of this book. Herbert von Karajan was Schwarzkopf's protector. Even more importantly so was her husband, Walter Legge, recording manager of her company, HMV, and their relationship gave

rise to some of the great recordings of *Lieder* and opera of the last fifty years. Legge, a streetwise Londoner of great musical acumen, went to Austria and Germany immediately after the war

to sign up the best artists, Nazi or otherwise, for his company. He found no dishonour in promoting von Karajan long before the conductor was cleared of Nazi entanglements.

Ultimately, of course, it was neither Legge nor her own sometimes suspect *nous*, that saw to Schwarzkopf's success. Her musicality was huge, even if her voice wasn't. Her husband nurtured her critical intelligence, dictating her interpretations precisely, until her scores were thick with red directions to herself and her singing sounded sometimes mannered. Not that she seems to have lacked self-confidence, though: the flipside of severe self-criticism was severe self-admiration. For a Desert Island Discs programme

in 1958, seven out of eight of Schwarzkopf's choices were recordings of her own voice.

In the end, though, biographies of singers, like biographies of Bordeaux chateaux, are pale reflections of the real thing, using a language which is often just as curious and inbred. The singer's voice will, one knows, be termed "at some point 'the instrument'". Recording will be topped up a notch and get called "committing to disc". Statements about star quality ("which you either possess or you don't") will find their way in. Connoisseurs are this book's only possible readership, for whom all the scandal and the nice, retrospective distinctions will be a thrill. To anyone else the advice is simple. Don't read. Just listen.

Lanterns and lovers on a passage to Paris

Julian Barnes is always an intelligent writer, but his new stories are sexy and affectionate too. By Michèle Roberts

Crossing the Channel has long signified for English people our version of passage rites, initiation into the grown-up pleasures of good food and wine, sophisticated sex, witty conversation, and a different way of life, to be eagerly anticipated or dourly sniffed at depending on our particular blend of puritanism and nationalism. Our ambivalence about the crossing has inspired many a sub-plot in our literature, has created many a comi-tragic character, pulled in both directions at once.

The Channel crossing can also stand as a fine example of the imagination at work. We throw out our mind-lassos into the

unknown, and rope in creatures whose names we don't know, who introduce a touch of wildness into our minds. We voyage into the darkness and take risks, all for the sake of adventure. We learn to speak new languages. We allow ourselves in the hurly-burly of forgiveness, to be transformed. This is a daily, human necessity, not confined to writers or lovers.

Julian Barnes's new book of stories functions like a gift, to remind us of this. His writing demonstrates the hallowing lightness of imagination, like a magical tent suddenly springing up, and also the desire to observe very closely and learn about the beloved object, as though seeing it for the first time. Reading these stories, you perceive and love France afresh.

This is the Barnes book I've

most enjoyed. It's characterised by the intelligence, irony and wit you associate with his writing, but is also suffused with feeling, deeply seasoned with affection. The relaxed but total confidence

complete command of their fictional worlds, well-travelled in the land of words, *urbzne*, not given to showing off, adept at puns, fond of jokes. Rather

stubborn heretic, bent on surviving the horrors visited upon his family, has also cut three pieces of beechwood the exact size of the panels of glass. When these were inserted, the flame would be cast in a single direction only. Pierre Chaigne puts the pieces of beechwood at one end of his workshop. At the end of the story, in which he speaks only once to ask why, he takes his lantern, inserts the pieces of beechwood, then follows the light of his lamp reached tremblingly towards the forest, where the other obstinate ones waited for him to join them in prayer."

This beautiful and moving story works through simplicity and understatement, its brutal facts calmly set down.

Barnes can be very funny too. The charming tale of Uncle Freddy's embroilment in the practical sex research of the Surrealists uses French puns and misunderstandings to give several twists to the old double standard which used to insist that only men were curious to experience lots of different lovers. The delicious Aunt Kate, not quite as pure as Freddy likes to make out, may gather, have had the last of several laughs. The sexiest writing is nearly always comic at the same time, thus saving itself from purple prose. This story is a star example. It detonates in the reader's imagination just after its closing lines. Pure *jouissance*.

Barnes writes about women with interest, tenderness and sympathy, as being truly the friends of men. He gets close up to his women characters in an affectionate and relaxed way. These qualities are exquisitely demonstrated in my favourite story, "Hermitage" concerns both wine-making and the retreat from the world. Florence and Emily find their joy in the Medoc, setting up home with each other and rescuing the vineyards of a chateau fallen on hard times. The denouement, both sweet and sexy, is like the *Song of Songs* crossed with Colette. *Encore*.



Julian Barnes: pure *jouissance*

of the story-telling is expressed through the narrators he employs. Whether first or third person, ruefully amused or compassionately involved, they are in

Audiobooks



Whisky Galore
read by Stanley Baxter

The Dark Room
read by Saskia Wickham

To abridge or not to abridge? I had no problem at all with the shortened version of Compton Mackenzie's *Whisky Galore* (BBC Radio Collection, £7.99). It gives far more of the original than the film did, and, read by Stanley Baxter with a Hebridean tilt so authentic that it had me pinning for a ceilidh, it provided more smiles per mile than any tape I've so far test-driven.

But the abridged version of *The Dark Room*, the most recent of Minette Walters's macabre thrillers (Hodder Headline, £7.99) is a disaster. Although very well read by Saskia Wickham, the severe pruning of the subplots, red herrings and carefully laid clues does no justice to Walters's consummate skill in plotting, and the sudden denouement left me quite bewildered. In this case, it's worth going the whole horrific hog, and quaking with fear to the excellent full-length version read by the very vocally versatile Patricia Gallimore (*Soundings*, £5.99).

Christina Hardymont

Bye-bye, baby

A kidnapped child, a deal with God and lots of Irish guilt. D.J. Taylor reads a striking debut

Mary Morrissey's first novel is a triptych on the theme of the divided self. Based on the ancient fictional conceit of the stolen child, it examines the events from the point of view of the kidnapper – a childless woman, inevitably enough – the mother, and the child itself. Each protagonist comes weighed down with a substantial freight of sinister interior baggage.

For Irene, who stalks purposefully into a Belfast maternity ward and abstracts the contents of an unguarded cot, the roots of obsession lie in illness. Struck down with TB at the age of 18, six years in a gruesome sanatorium, survivor of a ghastly operation which seems only a parody of caesarian section, she emerges as the wife of a silent, credulous man named Stanley, first encountered over his mother's deathbed. Stanley turns out to be impotent; neighbourhood gossip is increasingly censorious. No objection having been raised to the baby who arrives in Irene's charge one afternoon, the two conceal the theft for four years, until a revenant from the old hospital days, calling by chance on his rounds as a travelling salesman, guesses the truth and calls the police.

The story shifts to Rita, mother of "Baby Spain" (the case becomes a national *cause célèbre*), a gauche and impressionable teenager whose infatuation with a likely-looking cinema usher results in pregnancy and a forced marriage. Psychologically unbalanced even before the trauma of the empty cot, conducting her life through a series of divine bargains ("he could even take Mel if she could have her baby back!"), Rita takes up ballroom dancing and conceives a second child with her demure Italian instructor. Her husband's death in a bungled terrorist execution is a working-out of the spiritual contract. Even so, when the authorities arrive with news of the baby, Rita's guilt-ridden response is to scream, "I haven't done anything!"

Something more of Rita's embattled character and capacity for deception is revealed in the monologue of her daughter, which takes up the novel's third section. Brought up to believe in the existence of a "lost" third baby, Mary

Mother of Pearl
by Mary Morrissey
Cape, £9.99

recreates her sister as "Jewel," a familiar who accompanies her through adolescence. Married to a police photographer, Mary discovers Jewel to be infinitely preferable to the real foetus in her womb and does something very unfortunate with a knitting needle.

Morrissey's eerie taste for back-street Grand Guignol informs several of the strokes in her 1993 collection, *A Lazy Eye* (Vintage, £5.99). Awash with menstrual blood and symbolic denouements, they reach a macabre height in "Rosa," which climaxes in the substitution of a real baby for the ornament of a department store crib immediately before closing time on Christmas Eve. Like the stories, *Mother of Pearl* is variable in quality. Part One, while excellent on the ground-down atmosphere of the TB hospital, is over-written; Part Two, by contrast, seems an immensely subtle psychological portrait; while the first-person narrative of Part Three is a touch clumsy and prone to let too many cats out of what is by now a crowded mental bag.

One sees what Morrissey is trying to do in some of her more fervent passages, and the kind of symbolical fanfares to which she aspires, but the result sometimes verges on the effortful. Thus, when Irene journeys to the hospital, "The bus was a beast driven. It huddled and swayed, wipers clinging gamely to its snout. Granitefield stood in a stretch of grizzled countryside, seeping grey stone... giving way to barred teeth-like windows. A few trees rose supplicant from the dusty fields..." To balance this is a densely evoked Irish atmosphere of rain, tension and unhappiness, with The Troubles always lurking dangerously in the background. *Mother of Pearl* won a Lannan Award (£50,000 and no questions asked) on its recent publication in America, but for the moment it is easier to discern promise than accomplishment.



A carved wooden bust, sightless eyes and immeasurable amounts of headgear greet the visitor to Lawrence Durrell's house on the edge of Sommieres in the south of France, whither he moved in 1965 to write and paint and play jazz piano. It's one of a hundred entrancing photographs by Erica Leonard in *Writers' Houses* by Francesca Pretorius-Drokers published just before Christmas (Cassell, £25) and features the dreamily luxurious domestic interiors of 20 authors, from Karen Blixen's severe Danish manor house to Yeats's blessed and beautiful Thoor Ballylee. Turn the pages and die of envy.

Paperbacks



Reviewed by Emma Hagestadt and Christopher Hirst



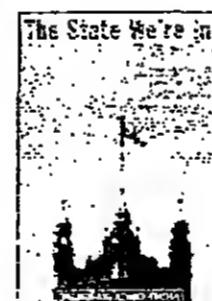
The Lost Treasures of Troy
by Caroline Moorehead
(Phoenix, £10.99)

Absorbing biography of Heinrich Schliemann, who set the world agog in the 1860s by unearthing a golden hoard in Asia Minor. It was from the legendary city of Troy – though the discoveries predated Helen by 1000 years. Despite his brutal excavation methods, Schliemann was acclaimed "father of pre-history". Held as Russian booty in 1945, the artifacts are only now reappearing.



It Came from Memphis by Robert Gordon (Secker, £9.99)

Fruity, irresistible yarns about unsung heroes of the rock and roll city, ranging from blues legend Furry Lewis, supplied with whisky by the author in breaks from school, to wrestler Sputnik Morgan (catchphrase "I'll jump in the air and shit in your hair"). Lynchpin of the local music scene is Jim Dickinson, who opines: "Hits are in baseball; singles are in bars and your royalty lives in a castle in Europe."



The State We're In by Will Hutton (Vintage, £7.99)

Richly meriting its success, this book is a tonic. Hutton starts with an informed tour d'horizon citing the short-termism and pocket-lining which characterise our market economy. Worst of all is the idea that high unemployment is immutable. The solution is Keynes's "cooperative capitalism" along with constitutional reform. Hutton's cheering view is that Britain has "a remarkable chance to change itself".



Eccentricities by David Weeks and Jamie James (Phoenix, £6.99)

This entertaining defence of the zany combines academic research and journalistic anecdotes. Some stories are familiar, such as Berners' pastel-dyed doves and Firbank consuming a single pea at a banquet, but did you know that director Ed Wood wore a pink bra and panties throughout his war service? Eccentrics turn out to be less mad than the norm, but this book fails to explain why they tend to be extremely right-wing.



Voices of the Old Sea by Norman Lewis (Picador, £5.99)

Though first published in 1984, this wonderful book recalls a period just after the war when Lewis lived in a poor fishing community in north-east Spain. Reticent, dignified and austere, the villagers cling to old ways, improvising blank verse and observing medieval ritual. But this ancient idyll was doomed. The barbarian, clutching suntan oil, was at the gate. Keen-eyed and pell-mell, it is Lewis's finest work.



The Orange Tree by Carlos Fuentes (Picador, £6.99)

Whether it's the Spanish in Mexico, the Romans in Spain, or the Californians in Acapulco, Carlos Fuentes loves the historical complications thrown up when two worlds collide. Four thematically-related novellas in which Aztec kings, Hollywood stars, and even Marks & Spencer sales assistants, stalk the blood-red horizon with equal gravitas.



Coconuts for the Saints by Debra Spark (Faber, £8.99)

Set in the candy-coloured streets of old San Juan, Sandro's bakery is the town's meeting place for those with a romantic turn of heart. But for the baker's triplet daughters, Tata, Melone and Beatriz, a life sandwiched between coconut kisses and shell-shaped cookies leaves much to be desired. A first novel it's hard not to like: everyone and everything in it tastes so good.



Making It Work: Women, Change and Challenge in the 1990s by Sue Innes (Chatto, £10.99)

A woman shepherd may have won *One Man and his Dog*, *Star Trek* may have diverted itself of gendered language, and Kirsty Wark may front *Newnight*, but, wonders Scottish journalist Sue Innes, have women's lives really changed for the better in the last 25 years? Most women (who are probably too overworked to read this book) will already know the answer.



Jack the Modernist by Robert Gluck (Serpent's Tail, £8.99)

With chapter-titles that sound like they've come out of a Woody Allen film – "My friend Bruce gave a housewarming party", or "Saturday began with a letter from Brian" – Robert Gluck's new novel tells how Bob falls for Jack (his red chamois shirt, gyroscopic nipples and herbal toothpaste), and how it all ends in tears in Leon's Soul Food restaurant.



The Wig My Father Wore by Anne Enright (Minerva, £6.99)

The man who appears on Grace's doorstep asking for a cup of tea turns out to be an angel – an angel with a celestial smile and a glittering crotch. He paints her walls white, fills the cupboards with Angel Delight and hovers comfortingly above her head as she sleeps. He even takes a kindly interest in her dying father's wig. One of Ireland's more surreal offerings.

Who's reading whom?

Stephen Bayley, design and style guru, picking his way through the debris of two tumultuous reputations of the 20th century



I find myself reading two books that have a curious similarity: Kenneth S. Lynn's *Hemingway* (Harvard) and Richard Webster's *Why Freud Was Wrong* (HarperCollins). Both of them not so much deconstruct as demolish the reputations of their subjects. Hemingway, the tough-but-sensitive hero with a cause, becomes a craven harragat, capable of facing bullets but incapable of facing up to himself. Freud, who used to know ourselves, traduced science in a self-serving quest to find data to support his whimsical and smutty convictions about the sources of behaviour. When figures of the stature of Hemingway and Freud are so icily scrutinised, you wonder about our contemporary need to disinherit ourselves. That's why they're such good books.

Reader offer

The Poetry Book Society was founded in 1953 by T S Eliot to encourage the art and publishing of poetry. Under the successive chairmanship of Eliot, Stephen Spender, Ted Hughes and Philip Larkin the society has blossomed and grown – and set up in 1993 an annual prize in its founder's name – but the basic format of membership remains unchanged. Members receive four new poetry books each year, selected by the PBS, receive a quarterly Bulletin and are offered 60 new titles at substantial discount. Craig Rainie is of the opinion that the PBS offers "the best introduction to British poetry I can think of." *Independent* readers have an opportunity to join the Society at a discounted rate of £20 (members pay £30) and the first 10 applicants will receive a complete set of books by the shortlisted poets for this year's TS Eliot Prize. To join, simply ring the Poetry Book Society for a membership form (0181 870 8403) quoting "Independent Offer".

Falling in love with the High Table heroes

Susie Boyt reads a first novel by a noted academic in which even the minor characters have PhDs

London Lovers
by Barbara Hardy
Peter Owen, £15.50

Yet unlike many of the women in the novels she studies, marriage is not an ending for Florence, but a false start. Her realisation that she does not wish to be married gives her a new beginning, so that by the time she meets Mick Solomon, distinguished American academic and husband of the invalid "horrible Ellen", she is able to build herself the kind of permanent love affair that allows her an intense and passionate involvement while maintaining a bed of her own.

London Lovers is a richly textured, multi-layered unfolding of a life devoted to love and work. It follows the professional and romantic career of Florence Jones, from young Welsh bride to London sophisticate, from student to professor of Eng. Lit. The book has a loose structure, spilling out episodes, observations and memories, constantly turning on itself as it weaves from future to present to past with no obvious rationale, except perhaps a commitment not to exclude anything, a form of openness which makes the experiences described seem unusually authentic.

After a modest upbringing in South Wales in the Thirties, where her aunt refuses to read her a bedtime story because she is "no scholar", Florence marries Charlie Jones, the boy next door (their wedding breakfast consisted of "Sberry and port and beer and ham sandwiches"). Florence completes her thesis and gains an academic post at London University. In her new milieu, friends and lovers meet on lecture tours, at High Table, at conferences and at academic parties where the Lowells and the Spenders are glimpsed. This is a novel in which even the minor characters have PhDs. Gradually Florence takes on some of the characteristics of her new worldly environment, displaying a cool detachment towards herself and her own behaviour, treating her life as a form of experimental text, having a go at infidelity to see what it feels like, casually allowing her marriage to fail, not because it is a bad one but because the idea of being married no longer seems to suit her. She moves in with a lacklustre man ("He was quite a good mathematician I was told, but kept his intellect for his maths") but comes back to Charlie and attempts to mend the marriage with children.

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At regular intervals throughout the book, Florence refers to an unfinished novel she wrote years before, about the same set of characters in which she used her husband's middle name for the surname of her lover and left her spinster aunt who had gone into service. These references give the actual text an odd sort of integrity, creating the sense that what she did choose to write is especially deliberate. We might have had to settle for a version in which Aunt Mary was left out because her life was too sad, but we were undervalued at the last moment. This device raises questions about the kind of treatment experience has to undergo in order that it can become fiction. More than a passionate telling of two different ways of loving, this is a novel about writing.



country



The railway/A5 wildlife corridor near Milton Keynes
Photo: Nicky Wheeler

Milton Keynes: wilder than you thought

Yes, yes, there are concrete cows. But now MK is attracting birds, butterflies and otters. By Tony Kelly

Nicky Wheeler is a woman with a mission. She wants otters to return to Milton Keynes.

You might think that the closest you would get to wildlife in Milton Keynes would be the much-ridiculed sculpture of concrete cows, but you would be wrong. Since development began in the Sixties 400 acres of woodland have been planted; a fifth of the city is taken up by green space.

There are more species of wildlife in Milton Keynes than there were 30 years ago. "I saw a deer and a pheasant on my way to work today," says Nicky, "and people in city-centre offices see herds leaping out of hedges."

As for otters: "They used to be here years ago, and you still find them on the Ouse in Bedford and Buckingham, so I'm sure they'll be back soon," Nicky enthuses. "Otters travel long distances to find mates, but they need quiet areas to hide and rest along the way, among bramble or scrub or beneath overhanging trees. A lot of trees have been cut down on the riverbanks, leaving fewer areas for otter holes. By building log holes on the river's edge, covered with branches like enormous bonfires, we can encourage otters to come back."

Nicky is project officer for the Milton Keynes Wildlife Corridor Project, which aims to identify and

protect corridors for wildlife throughout the city. A corridor is just what it says, a green link between larger areas of habitat. It could be a river, stream or hedgerow, an embankment, a footpath or even a road.

"The best wildlife corridors are those which are continuous and contain several different habitats to encourage different species," says Nicky. Most of these are in the city rather than the surrounding farmland, where intensive arable farming has left islands of ancient woodland surrounded by fields.

"Once habitats are isolated," she explains, "there are too many pressures on small wildlife communities. Droughts, floods and fires can be disastrous and there is lowered resistance to disease because of inbreeding. Corridors enable plants and animals to colonise new sites if they feel threatened. Foxes and badgers can move very quickly, but a corridor may have to support a butterfly community over several generations."

Not everyone is convinced. "It's difficult to find proof that corridors work," says Dave Dawson of the London Ecology Unit, who has carried out a study of wildlife corridors for English Nature.

"Some species need them, like frogs and toads who need wet and dry land at different times of year and wouldn't survive in a pond surrounded by concrete. But it's

probably only a minority of species – though probably those most in need of conservation.

"As a scientist, I would like to see more research, to find out which species use them."

Nicky Wheeler accepts the need for research but is impatient to act now. "The dormouse is in national decline," she says, "and has died out in Milton Keynes. They tend to move along the tops of hazel trees without coming down to ground, so they need a continuous line of treetops."

Then there is the marbled white butterfly. A few years ago there was only one known site for it in the city, now there are several on the embankment beside the main London-to-Birmingham rail line. "We think it has spread along the railway corridor," she says.

The first task in protecting corridors is to identify them with the help of technology. "We began by looking at aerial photographs for an overview of where the green spaces are, then narrowed it down to exclude short-mown grass and non-native plantations – otherwise all of Milton Keynes could have been labelled 'green,'" says Nicky.

By way of illustration we look out of her office window in Campbell Park to see a neat cricket pitch, and green space as far as the eye can see. Yet we are only a mile from central Milton Keynes. This is a city with the fastest population growth in Britain – more than 40

per cent in the Eighties – and the extra houses and cars all add to the pressures on wildlife.

"We identified 21 key corridors, such as rivers, the Grand Union Canal, brooks, streams and the railway," Nicky continues. "I spent the long hot summer out of doors surveying the sites, to chart the main habitats – woodland, grassland and so on before putting the information on computer."

On the wall of her office I look at the result: a computerised map of the city superimposed with areas of habitat in different colours. You see a corridor of woodland beside a river, then you spot a gap which needs to be bridged. Funds and volunteers permitting, bridging these gaps is the next stage of the work.

One of the key corridors lies along the Ouse Valley, much of it within one of the city's parks. We leave the car near the old village of Simpson and walk towards the river. We pass an old paddock, ancient hay meadows, wide double hedgerows and a lake covered in willow and reed beds. A pair of herons swoop over the lake as if on cue. "Come back in spring and the air will be thick with butterflies," promises Nicky.

A few miles away, by the same river, we stand beside an old Roman road, now named the V4 (V for vertical) in Milton Keynes' grid system. It doesn't look promising – a hoarded-up pub, a

factory, a garden centre, sports fields. But even here there are things that can be done. "Those playing fields have cut grass all the way to the riverbank," said Nicky. "Just moving them a few yards in could provide a hiding place for otters. And the riverbanks are too steep, like canals – they need to be gentler and wider. And that poplar plantation – if you mixed in some oak and ash you'd have more diversity." She is like a detective, looking for clues wherever she goes.

"We've got the advantage in a new city that green spaces were planned from the beginning, and development is still going on so we can influence it from the start," she says. "But I really think this can be used as a model for urban development elsewhere. Milton Keynes shows how you can start off with an intensively farmed landscape and create something much more diverse. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a national network of wildlife corridors?"

"It's all about planning for diversity," she adds, "and explaining to developers the need to maintain wildlife links. I think development can be used in a positive way. There's no automatic conflict between conservation and development."

Milton Keynes Wildlife Corridor Project can be contacted on 01908 201567.

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A regular supply of different foods is what garden birds need to help them through the winter

By Anna McKane

Crumb from the Christmas table may make the difference between life and death for small birds at this time of year. So give that reproachful piece of Christmas cake at the back of the cupboard to those who really need it.

Cakes, puddings and old mince pies are all ideal for birds, as they contain nuts, fats and fruit. A regular supply of different foods is what garden birds need to help them through the winter, as Chris Harbard of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds recently explained to me.

Scattering a few crumbs on the lawn when we remember is not going to be of much use and it is no surprise that those of us who do that see only sparrows and fat woodpeckers. A variety of foods will attract a variety of birds.



birds will fight rather than feed.

Make sure there is always a supply of clean water, not just for drinking, but also for the birds to bathe in. They need to do this, even in the coldest weather, because clean feathers provide better insulation.

A bird-friendly garden will also have berrying shrubs such as holly, pyracantha and berberis. Holly and other dense evergreens provide cover for small birds to roost at night.

Now is also the time to think about nest boxes. They should be put in position soon, so that birds can get used to them, ready for when they start inspecting sites next month.

There are two basic types: those with a small hole in the front are for tits, and those with an open front are for robins and wrens. There are also artificial house martin nests on the market, which can be placed under the eaves. House martins can be difficult to please. They tend to nest in colonies, and certain types of brick do not seem to appeal to them. There is a theory that they prefer to nest under dark-painted eaves.

Wrens will sometimes roost overnight in nest boxes during the winter, and 40 wrens have been sighted crammed into one nest box. They will nest in boxes, too, but as the male has to build three or four nests and show them to his prospective mate for her to choose from, the box may be abandoned in favour of another site. It is a hard enough life for a small bird to find one suitable site, let alone four. So it is no wonder that, according to the RSPB, a wren has been seen nesting in a pair of underpants on a washing line.

The RSPB will send free information on looking after wild birds: RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. Their marketing arm issues a free catalogue which includes details of tables, nest boxes and food: RSPB, PO Box 54, Burton-upon-Trent, Staffordshire DE14 3LQ.

A little local trouble

A weekly round-up of rural rumpuses

And Teresa Gorman MP thinks she has problems with the planning authorities. Spare a thought this week for 13-year-old Samson Greenhalgh, as he faces the next round of a war of words with East Dorset District Council in Wimborne.

Four years ago, Samson began to build a tree-house – a wooden platform four feet off the ground and six-feet-square – on land belonging to his parents' pub at Sproxton Handley, Dorset, and for an only child who had just moved to the village, the "house" soon became an invaluable aid to making new friends. That is, until last September, when acting on a tip-off from residents of a neighbouring trailer park, the district council ordered him to seek planning permission or demolish the structure.

After protracted wrangling, the council has now hinted that a dash of green paint and a few structural changes may make the "house" acceptable. The catch? It looks likely to cost £160 in application fees. Next week: Tree-house Boy in Negative Equity Shock.

He flattened the buildings, cut down the trees and left with a six-figure profit. So why could no one stop him?



DUFF HART-DAVIS

Within miles, and no proper access. Almost certainly the local planning authority would have refused permission to convert the barn into a house. All the same, the mere existence of the buildings kept the dream alive.

Then that 100-acre block of land changed hands. For several years the new owner tried to build a house, not around the barn, but on a virgin site a few hundred yards up the fields. Happily, he was frustrated, not least by the fact that a rival landowner demanded an exorbitant amount of money for passage across an intervening neck of ground.

Nothing, however, stopped him destroying the dilapidated old yard. First the barn was bulldozed out of existence, the stone carted off and sold. Then the beeches were cut down. The sheds, stables and hayloft soon followed suit. Finally, as if to obliterate every trace, the new owner scooped up trailer-loads of soil and dumped them on the site, levelling the earth to make the old yard part of the field.

I saw it as potentially a wonderful place in which to live. There were drawbacks. Walls of the same material divided the fields, forming wind-

breaks, and on one side of the farmyard, behind the stables, was a double column of splendid old beeches, whose silvery trunks matched the colour of the stone.

The barn was still being used to store hay and straw, but the stables had fallen into decay. The yard was by no means suited to latter-day agriculture, being too small and too far away from any other centre of activity, and yet, even though it had no practical future, it formed an attractive feature.

The buildings were made of local stone, bleached to a pleasing light grey by years of wind, rain and frost. Walls of the same material divided the fields, forming wind-

breaks, and on one side of the farmyard, behind the stables, was a double column of splendid old beeches, whose silvery trunks matched the colour of the stone.

The barn was still being used to store hay and straw, but the stables had fallen into decay. The yard was by no means suited to latter-day agriculture, being too small and too far away from any other centre of activity, and yet, even though it had no practical future, it formed an attractive feature.

Nothing, however, stopped him destroying the dilapidated old yard. First the barn was bulldozed out of existence, the stone carted off and sold. Then the beeches were cut down. The sheds, stables and hayloft soon followed suit. Finally, as if to obliterate every trace, the new owner scooped up trailer-loads of soil and dumped them on the site, levelling the earth to make the old yard part of the field.

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travel weekend skiing

Verbier: there's some good news and some bad news

Snow's Up

By Chris Gill

I've written before in these pages about Verbier, a Swiss resort that's a long-standing favourite of British skiers (and particularly popular with both the British and the Swiss for weekend trips). Some go there (rightly in my view) for the impressive off-piste skiing, the pleasantly traditional village ambience, the vibrant social scene and the splendid views. But others go because they think its piste skiing ranks alongside that of French resorts such as Courchevel and Val d'Isère.

The comparison is wrong partly because the "four valleys" ski area that Verbier is a part of is a struggle affair, involving links that are, to say the least, tenuous. For example, to leave the local Verbier skiing and get to the skiing of Thyon or Nendaz you have to take a lift or ski down an off-piste route. (This observation highlights another drawback of the Verbier skiing, which is that many of the best runs are now formally off-piste.) But I have accused Verbier of other problems, too: lift queues, piste crowding, poor piste maintenance and marking, and limited snowmaking – and all this in the resort with Europe's most expensive lift pass.

In the course of my December tour of major Alpine resorts I paid a visit to Verbier. Waiting for me at the tourist office there was a strongly worded letter from the director, Patrick Messelier, objecting to these criticisms of the resort. I am, he says, wrong about dreadful queues, wrong about piste crowding (except at weekends), and so on; it is all a "preconception" on my part. It's not, of course – I've checked the files and verified that the reports from last season's holiday skiers, on which these criticisms were based, are real and not imagined. I concede that snowmaking has improved, although it's still

confined to one main run down from Attelas to the village. The very powerful double-mono-cable gondola opened last season from Ruinettes to Attelas has helped with the queues, too – but only up to a point. A visit last February by one of my most trusted correspondents revealed queues at times even for that capacious lift – and confirmed no less than six other trouble spots.

The worst of these, as even Mr Messelier concedes, is the old and quite inadequate four-man Chassoure gondola from Thyon. This lift – a key element in the links with Thyon and Nendaz – is apparently to be replaced "in the near future"; but since I have been publicly complaining about queues for this lift since 1986, I may perhaps be excused if I say I am unimpressed by this promise.

I'm keen to make sure that my picture of Verbier is an accurate one; it is, after all, a highly popular resort, and it couldn't stay that way if people didn't like the place enough to go back for more.

My correspondent's visit was, I admit, confined to only a single week which could have been an exceptionally bad one. I'll certainly arrange for another correspondent to visit in high season this year, if I can't get there myself – but we may be unlucky again. So I invite readers' help. If you visit Verbier this season, let me know what you think of the skiing, particularly the lifts and the density of skiers (and boarders) on the main pistes in the Attelas/Ruinettes area. The three most detailed reports (which does not mean the three most critical) will earn a copy of the book I edit, *Where to Ski*.

A head start for a quick getaway

Colin Brown and his wife flew from London City Airport to Geneva for a weekend of skiing

The advantages of using London City Airport began to pall when we were told that the 9.20am flight to Geneva would be delayed one hour and 50 minutes. We were in the departure lounge, where unfortunately there was no newspaper shop offering helpful items to fill the time. The woman at the flight desk was full of apologies and gave us a £4 voucher each for breakfast.

An hour went by, then there was another announcement. The plane was ready to leave. Scramble. The news caught my wife in the ladies. There must be few airports in Britain where the flight desk assistant will dash into the loo to retrieve passengers so that the aircraft can take off in time to fit its slot in the air traffic, but that is what she did.

The first time you use London City Airport you can't help being struck by the easy nature of the place: it's bit like stepping back in time to the pre-war era of air travel. The traveller walks through a small banger, past a cheery looking passport officer, through a lounge, out across the tarmac and on to the aircraft. In this deserted part of Docklands, there are still propeller engined passenger planes on some regular routes.

Our flight was by jet – an Avroliner RJS. There was the added bonus that there were only 10 people on the Friday morning flight, giving

ing a passenger/air hostess ratio of about 3:1. The flight was barely beyond Docklands when the complimentary champagne was being poured alongside offerings of smoked salmon nibbles.

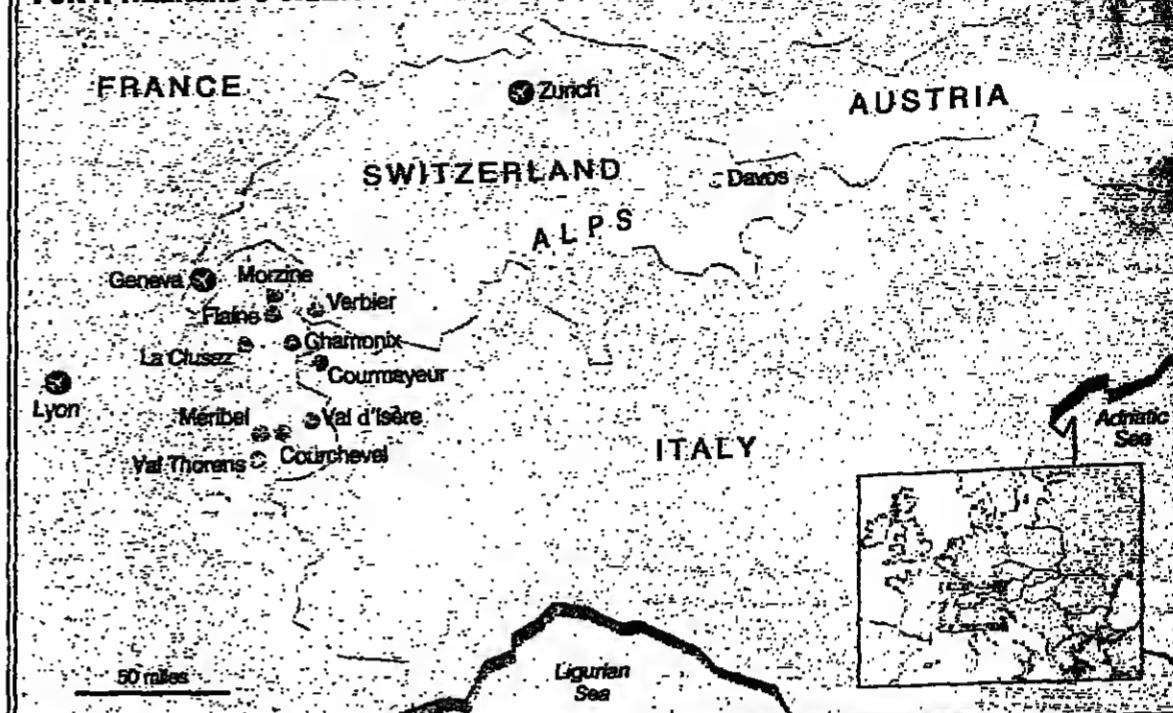
We were flying to Geneva for a weekend break because we could not face the stress of the M4 to the West Country or the M1 to the Peak District. A new motorway has brought Geneva airport to within an hour's easy drive of the ski resorts, making a long weekend in the Alps a realistic option. The only problem has been the journey to Heathrow from South East London. I had heard about London City, but did not know they had regular scheduled services to Geneva.

On the first occasion I used this airport, I went for a weekend mountain biking in the Chamounix valley, before the snow fell. There are plenty of shops offering mountain bikes to rent, and the local tourist office issues a map showing the routes for mountain bikes, known as Velos Toutes Terrains (VTT).

They are graded green, blue, red and black, like ski pistes, in order of difficulty. I chose an easy green towards Argentiere, past the drop zone for the paragliders, who take off from the half-way station on the Brevant.

The weather was warm, the air soft, and the saddle hard as a knife. In winter the route doubles as a cross-country ski track, and

HOT SPOTS: WHERE TO GO FOR A WEEKEND'S SKIING



snakes through forests of pine, following the Arve river up towards the big ski area at Argentiere. This is macho-man country, and is renowned by extreme skiers for its steeps. The next day, I pushed the hike to the top of a pass at Les Houches. It was a red route on the map, but I could hardly manage a stroke of the pedal until near the top.

Returning on the Sunday night flight, there were double the number of passengers. Nevertheless, that still gave a ratio of 20 passengers to three air hostesses. It was like having an executive jet more or less at your disposal. Clearly, this sort of exclusive arrangement is usually intended for business passengers, but I was flying economy.

Given the high quality of the service, it struck me as very odd that so few people use London City. Crossair flies an 82-seater, four-engined "Jumbolino" jet on the Geneva route which is as fast as the bigger jets flown from either Heathrow or Gatwick airports. The London City experience was a bit like stumbling on a secret luxury air service. Four weeks later, I tried it again, travelling with my wife, but this time there was one snag: the French air-traffic controllers were on strike, hence the delay.

Once in the air, the service was just as smart as before. The pilot even came down the plane with the courtesy champagne to fill our glasses. He assured me that the service, which has been running for about two years, will continue despite the poor take-up of passengers so far.

On the return on Sunday night, we had got to the Swissair gate 21 at Geneva airport to board the flight, when we were told about the problem of the fog. "Your flight is on time, but it is being diverted to Stansted or Luton," said the woman at the gate.

We were told the problem was that London City Airport is not fully equipped to cope with fog. The Airport denies that. In the pre-war days, people would have lit barrels of oil to burn off the fog, but the airport is fully equipped with an instrument landing system. The fog that weekend, I was later told, was particularly thick at Docklands. We landed at Gatwick.

It was an inconvenience I felt prepared to overlook. I am horrified by the monster that Heathrow has become and find Gatwick overcrowded. For me, City is the best option, particularly if you are not averse to a little luxury.

Colin Brown flew with Crossair, booked through Swissair. His return economy fare including tax was £151. Swissair also booked a car for him through Budget at Geneva at a cost of about £30 a day.

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There is an intensity about the short skiing trip – an ordinary week away seem, well, ordinary

By Chris Gill

Britain is at its gloomy winter worst, the snow in your favourite resort sounds perfect, and you're itching to get back on skis. But maybe you're finding it difficult to take a week off work at this busy time of the year. Perhaps you're just looking for a quick fix to tide you over. Could a weekend skiing trip be the answer? A small band of tour operators and a growing number of their clients think it is.

Weekend skiing isn't for everyone. Going to the Alps for only three days has two clear drawbacks. The main one is the high cost per skiing day. The fixed costs of handling your booking and getting you out to the resort have to be spread over three days instead of the usual six. The cost of packages ranges from £265 to £750; £300 to £500 is more typical. But talk to those who have done it and you're quite likely to confront a sort of evangelism. The weekend skiing convert will tell you that there is an intensity about a short skiing trip that makes an ordinary week away seem, well, ordinary. You tend to pack a lot into a short trip, and come back satisfied even if you're tired. Although the cost per day is high, the total cost of a short trip is lower than that of a week.

The classic long weekend trip starts with a Thursday evening scheduled flight from an airport close to your place of work – Colin Brown describes London City airport's much overlooked service from the capital on the previous page – to Geneva, Lyon or Zurich. Pick up a hire car or board a transfer minibus. Get to your resort accommodation late. Ski yourself silly for three days. Catch the last possible flight back on Sunday evening and get home late. Appear at work on Monday morning wearing a smug grin.

Variations include two- and four-night stays. To cut down that fixed hassle factor, you can opt for air taxi transfers to and from Courchevel's airstrip – by plane for minimum cost, by helicopter for maximum excitement.

Where to go

The choice of resort for a weekend trip is problematic. Resorts that offer short transfers are by definition close to cities full of skiers likely to be tempted on to your chosen slopes if the weather is good. Whereas Val d'Isère may be relatively quiet on Saturdays because most of the visitors are in transit, Verbier (half the distance from Geneva) may be invaded by day-trippers.

The established specialists in the weekend business tend to focus on convenient resorts, putting up with the risk of crowds. Chamonix is a prime destination for weekend skiing which falls firmly in this category. Not only does it offer a lot of the most challenging skiing in the Alps only an hour's drive from Geneva, it also has the infrastructure to suit the weekend trade: abundant small hotels that are glad to let their rooms just for the weekend without levying a punitive surcharge.

But my advice is to focus more on whether the resort offers the right sort of skiing, and whether you can get the right sort of deal. Consider Chamonix, of course, but don't rule out a two- or three-hour transfer if it will get you to a resort you really fancy.

Who to go with

Several small tour operators specialise in weekend packages, and some of the larger ones offer them as an option. Small operators who normally sell week-long packages have the flexibility to fix shorter holidays, particularly at times when their standard programme is not heavily booked. Of course, you don't have to limit yourself to packages but it's easy to spend a lot of money unless you have the time to research the market carefully. A travel agent can be very helpful in assembling the elements at reasonable cost, but unless you have an exceptional local firm, stick to the specialist skiing agents, of which Ski

Solutions (0171-602 9900) is the leader.

Start with the brochures of the three operators dedicated to the weekend trip or variants on it: FlexiSki (0171-352 0044) has upmarket chalets, chalet-hotel and hotels in Courchevel and Verbier. It offers "standard" four-night packages, but can provide any other arrangements.

Sid Weekend (01367 241636) has a wide range of hotel-based possibilities set out in a rather confusing brochure. Main resorts are Morzine, La Clusaz, Chamonix and La Grave; in the last two, off-piste tuition or guidance are also offered.

White Roc (0171-792 1188) offers a wide range of hotels (and some self-catering) in a total of nine resorts in Switzerland, Italy and France.

Then there is a large number of operators who deal mainly in seven-night holidays but advertise shorter alternatives: Bigfoot Chamonix (01491 579601) does a lot of weekend business, based in a wide range of hotels. Bladon Lines (0181-780 8800) can fix short trips out of peak season. Collinewe (01276 24262) has captivating chalets in Chamonix, with four-night deals. Fresh Tracks (0181-875 9818) is an off-piste specialist whose programme includes weekend trips on specific dates. Easter in Flaine, two dates in Chamonix, five dates in macho La Grave. Ksoni (01306 742500) is a mainstream operator to Switzerland, with a wide choice of hotel-based weekend holidays at the extremes of the season. Neilsma (0113-239 4555) has attractively priced three-day trips to Isola 2000, in the far south of the French Alps. Powder Byrne (0181-871 3300) has a sideline in off-piste tuition, offering weekends in several resorts. The Ski Company (0171-730 9600) is an upmarket chalet operator which offers weekend deals, particularly out of high season. Swiss Travel Service (01992 456123) has hotel-based weekends in Switzerland in low season.

There has been patchy snow (sometimes with strong winds) in parts of the Alps this week, but there have also been some high temperatures. The result is that in many areas skiing conditions have improved slightly at altitude, while at low levels the already scratchy conditions have deteriorated.

In Austria the last modest snowfall was at the beginning of the week. Since then even the higher resorts, such as Lech, village runs have suffered, while

in lower resorts such as Kitzbühel they have become very worn. Most resorts have managed to stay fully open.

In Switzerland, most resorts are reporting less snow than a week ago, and although most areas are almost open, lower runs are unpleasant and some areas such as Gstaad and Wengen are only partly open. There was midweek snow in some French resorts, but it didn't amount to much and very little found its way to the low northern

Snow reports

resorts such as Megève and La Clusaz, which desperately need it.

In Italy, altitude is the key. The outlook for the Alps is unclear, with lows and weather fronts in the Atlantic, but a big high over Russia is said to be moving slowly Alpwards.

Colorado has seen some heavy snow this week – 1.3m in Breckenridge, for example – and the storms that hit Boston and New York hit the New England resorts as well.

Photograph: Shishir Dastidar



something to declare

Trouble spots

This week's advice from our man in the Foreign Office

Cameroun: "Highway robberies in the north of the country appear to be under control. Nevertheless, travellers between Maroua and the border with Chad should continue to seek advice from the local police and be prepared to travel with a military escort."

Philippines: "Criminal and political violence is a problem in remote parts of North Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. The islands south west of Mindanao, where there has been heavy fighting, should be avoided."

Colombia: "Violence and kidnapping in Colombia. In rural areas there is a serious risk of being caught up in terrorist attacks or opportunistic kidnapping. Travel by air is preferable."

Libya: "Since April 1992, UN Security Council sanctions include a ban on flights to and from Libya, making speedy evacuation from Libya for medical or other emergencies difficult."

Foreign Office travel advice is available on 0171-270 4129; on BBC-2 Ceefax page 564 onwards; and on the Internet at <http://www.fco.gov.uk>

Travel competition

It may have been a little chilly recently but it seems that cold climates have never been more popular. That's if the deluge of entries we've received for our Free Freeze competition for a break in Iceland or the Shetland Islands is anything to go by. We are still in the process of ploughing through the post and so will not be able to print the names of the winners and the answers this week, as originally planned. The results will appear next week instead.

Visitors' book

Cathedral Refectory, Rochester

"I like your banana cake"

– Imogen, Rochester

"I'm sure this wasn't here when I went to school in Rochester"

– Roberta O'Neill, Didcot

"Smells good. Nice wide door for double buggy"

– Michael, Estelle and Ruby Thornton, Orpington

"Can't wait to sing Evensong later"

– Jenny Hearn and Ware Parish Church Choir

"Good grub. I enjoyed the starling chorus"

– G Brumstead, Putney

"It was nice to find somewhere in Rochester open at 4pm! Very good!"

– Sandie Terner, St Albans

An upgrade, like a £10 win in the Lottery, is not to be sniffed at. Although it only works once every two years, the extra cash and legroom make it worthwhile. So at Lusaka airport on New Year's Eve, I fished a crumpled jacket and tie out of my backpack and smiled inanely at anyone wearing a uniform.

While nursing a Mosi beer (an unfortunate brand-name in a malarial country), and my economy-class boarding pass, I was joined by a party of be-blazered fellow travellers. They, too, had smartened up in a bid to get upgraded. It became clear from the conversation that they were friends and family of the air crew, all travelling on staff discount tickets at fares so low that they would put Air Azerbaijan (currently offering a £159 one-way Heathrow-Karachi fare) out of business. And even though each had paid a fraction of my economy ticket, they had all been upgraded; not just to Club World, mind, but all the way to First.

So for the first time, I took decisive action. Instead of just simpering at check-in staff, I actually asked for an upgrade.

"No, that will not be possible". I squeezed into my seat among the other full fare paying mugs at the back of the plane, while the Champagne flowed in First.

While we economy customers were toasting the New Year with lukewarm Riesling, we were missing out on all the excitement, too. The boyfriend of one of the stewardesses proposed to her at midnight, 31,000 feet over the Sahara, and she happily accepted.

You may suddenly be finding British Airways cabin crew particularly attractive because

of the prospect of free or vastly reduced travel in First Class. But before you succumb to wedlock, beware the many potential sources of marital mayhem. For example, a letter I have just received at home. It is from a skiing magazine, thanking me for joining a trip last weekend to Zell am See.

"It was a pleasure to meet you," coos the letter. This is no form letter, but a personally signed missive from the publisher of Daily Mail Ski magazine. Yet I maintain that last weekend took me nowhere more adventurous than a cheap-day return to Rochester, with my feet planted firmly in Kentish mud rather than Austrian snow. This is the stuff of dreams for divorce lawyers.

The column's first prize of the year, a bottle of dodgy Riesling (which you may wish to drink lukewarm) to the person who can provide the best explanation of how I joined this particular mailing list. The same prize to someone who actually was on the trip and can explain what happened during it. The letter includes the ominous phrase "no one was more disappointed than I that despite careful thought, not everything went according to plan". So what went wrong? Anyway, if this letter is a foretaste of Virtual Travel, I think I'll stick to Kent.

Britain's seaside resorts are gearing up for what they hope will be a second bumper summer, but last August's sun seems to have gone to the heads of Poole's publicity department. A brochure for the Dorset resort reminds would-be visitors that Poole Harbour has Europe's largest oilfield, then trills cheerfully "The largest peace-time evacuation of civilians took place in Poole in 1988 when a chemical factory caught fire." Neighbouring Bournemouth, busily promoting clean air by banning smoking on three stretches of beach, must be fuming.



SIMON CALDER

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Blair and Clarke: are they by chance related?

No politician shifts a society single-handed, by sheer force of personality. The trick is to spot the trend, sense the mood of a society, capture it, mould it, describe it, and then claim the credit for it.

That is what Margaret Thatcher did in the Eighties. In an era that saw the world opening up to global competition, her advocacy of free markets, privatisation and lower taxation were of the moment and defined that moment. As a result, "Thatcherism" gained huge money in the country and eventually succeeded in converting her political opponents in the process. It spread throughout the Anglo-Saxon world, Europe, Asia and the post-Communist states. This was an extraordinarily successful exercise in dividing and appropriating the *Zeigeist*.

But what next? The struggle to differentiate Britain's main political parties – creating blue or red water between them – demonstrates the lack of a fresh Big Idea. We are halfway through the Nineties, with no new map to plot our course.

This week Tony Blair and (making a comeback) Margaret Thatcher set about changing all that. They offered themselves as cartographers of the decade. The Labour leader went to Singapore and sent back a message that a "stakeholder society" was the way forward for Britain. Meanwhile, Baroness Thatcher returned to the legacy of her guru, Keith Joseph, and set out her two key ideas for the Nineties: shrinking the state and creating an anti-European Little England.

These ideas are desperately vague. It is hard to know what a stakeholder society means. Mr Blair, perhaps deliberately, has done little to

resolve the confusion. It is just as difficult to know how Lady Thatcher would achieve her ends, which have until now been beyond British politicians. In power, she herself committed Britain to its present involvement with Europe and failed to reduce the level of national income spent by the state.

Yet vagueness is not necessarily fatal to new ideas. When Margaret Thatcher took office in 1979, she did not have a grand plan; she had a basic set of principles that chimed with popular opinion and were to underpin the specific policies of the following decade. The vital question is: do any of these ideas, or aspects of them, strike a chord today? In 10 years time, will they, like Eighties Thatcherism, be big enough to label an era?

Mr Blair's stakeholder society, for all its haziness, certainly resonates. Commentators have been intrigued by the word. The notion of everyone having a stake in society makes sense. It seems to describe an inclusive country, in which everyone has roots and a say over what happens. We need these notions at a time when competition and globalisation are tearing apart the glue that holds society together.

Jobs for life and the traditional welfare state are both under threat. They are increasingly seen as expensive luxuries at a time when flexible workforces and low taxation, financing a minimal state, are said to be the key to maintaining competitiveness. As a result, social cohesion – vital for stability and economic productivity – is in danger as crime rises and an underclass of the disadvantaged and disaffected develops. Britain,



along with other countries, needs a way of building a humane society in a global era.

But there is plenty of suspicion that the stakeholder idea is no more than a repackaging of failed Labour policies. It invokes the idea of empowering groups or individuals who have claim to be included in decision-making. But if Mr Blair merely intends to reinvigorate the power of trade unions and other institutions that ran the corporate state of the Seventies, then he has made a big mistake. Indeed, even if this was not intention, Mr Blair may have made a political error in resurrecting Labour's old ghosts.

He has also, by implication, associated himself with a body of literature about stakeholding in companies that says businesses should be run not only in the interests of shareholders, but of customers, employees, consumers and suppliers. This may sound wonderful in theory, but over-regulation could suffocate business and enterprise in much the same way as Labour's last failed exercise in economic micro-management – nationalisation.

In short, stakeholding may have nothing to do with the trends of the time, which are towards deregulation, free markets, individualism and increased competitiveness. But there is one version that might catch on, namely the notion that everyone should have their own individual stake in the welfare state. That could mean compulsory saving for state-overseen pensions schemes, vouchers for education and perhaps even new ways of establishing rights to treatment in the NHS.

If this is what Mr Blair means, then he may

be on to a Big Idea, albeit a controversial one that could prove politically impossible to implement. It would convert the welfare state into a system that was socially inclusive, but did not necessarily guarantee equality and which paid out more on the basis of lifetime contribution than need. It would represent a marriage of choice with collectivism, of self-reliance with state support, while giving people a greater sense of owning their entitlements. And it would permit a shift away from conventional taxation to claims by the state being earmarked for specific purposes.

If this is the direction in which Mr Blair is moving, there are good grounds for believing that his ideas will have a wider resonance. Indeed he will find plenty of fellow travellers on the Tory left. Much of what Mr Blair has to say about social inclusion and economic pragmatism echoes the language used by Kenneth Clarke. "The pace of change has created fears and uncertainties among men and women in every walk of life. A strong welfare state has an important role in reducing these fears," So said the Chancellor in his Maes Lecture 18 months ago.

In short, the chief British political divide may not be between Labour and the Tories, but between the Blair/Clarke philosophy – Blarikin – and Margaret Thatcher (and her acolytes), who this week made her bid to be the architect of the next decade, just as she was of the last.

Who will win? We cannot be sure. But the ideas that will triumph and eventually engulf all parties will be those that best ensure our survival in today's global, competitive market.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A&E wards: conditions that take a toll on doctors' morale

From Dr Julian Eyears
Sir: I strongly disagree with your assertion that junior doctors should be "press-ganged" into working in Accident and Emergency departments (leading article, 11 January).

I spent six months in two casualty departments in south-east London and I would rather resign my profession than do it again.

Notwithstanding being twice assaulted by patients I was trying to help, having the door of my treatment room kicked in by a man angered by the fact that my dying patient had jumped the queue ahead of his broken finger, and my writing table taken away by hospital management on the grounds that the doctors were "spending too much time writing", I was allowed two weekends out of 11 free, and was almost always working anti-social hours.

The stark reality is that not enough doctors wish to work in the NHS anymore, especially in A&E. A significant number of my contemporaries have been disillusioned that they have left medicine altogether.

Your leader demonstrates a public misconception that doctors are some sort of breed

apart of medical soldiers, ready to be drafted into any situation. Doctors are actually human beings. They have loved ones, emotions and outside lives. They don't want to work in A&E because the conditions are frequently so inhospitable that they take an unacceptable toll on their private and professional lives.

JULIAN EYEARS
London, SW2

From Dr E. E. J. Martin
Sir: In your leading article (11 January) you fail to mention one of the major factors leading to a shortage of accident and emergency junior doctors in England – the great shortage of doctors training to be general practitioners.

The Royal College of General Practitioners encourages GPs in training to do six months in A&E. However, the number of doctors training to become GPs has fallen by nearly 25 per cent over the past few years.

Recently, more surgery is carried out on a day-care basis, with a patient being discharged on the same day as their operation. Large psychiatric hospitals are being closed up and

down the country. In some cases, patients are cared for at home under the "hospital at home" scheme. When these patients are discharged the work that was previously done in the hospital is added to the tasks of the GP.

At the same time, the GP is having to get involved in purchasing the care for his patients. If one adds to this the increased requirements for health screening, the flood of paper now required by the Government about all our activities, the great increase in litigation against GPs and the increased demand for services at weekends and at nights, it is clear that the job of a GP has both changed and expanded hugely.

Young doctors see this great increase in work required of GPs, with no increase in income and a lowering of public esteem in the profession, and they decide not to enter family medicine. It is this lack of family doctors in training which is perhaps the most important factor in the understaffing of our accident departments.

Yours faithfully,
E. E. J. MARTIN
Bedford
11 January

From Mr Hugh J. Thomson
Sir: The crisis of beds and staffing in the NHS in recent days has been precipitated by a dramatic increase in the number of emergency admissions and the reason for this is not clear. What is clear is that many of the difficulties in responding to this crisis result from the changes in the health service over the past few years.

The NHS is being turned

into a National Health Business

Tess. To run a business suc-

cessfully there must be no

slack in the system: every

employee and every piece of

equipment need to be working

to the limit. This is not so

when it comes to people's

health. There are epidemics

and accidents, emergencies

and uncertainties. There

has to be a spare capacity to cope

with the unpredictability of

dealing with human beings

and their distress.

If the Government will not learn this lesson, the present crisis will be repeated again and again.

Yours,
HUGH J. THOMSON
Consultant Surgeon
Birmingham
11 January

Heaven is a place on earth

From Mr Norman Myers
Sir: In your leading article ("The church's empty Hell" (11 January)), you refer to the erroneous impression of Hell as "a place of endless torment". If Heaven is a place of ultimate being for and with others, could Hell be, as T. S. Eliot said, the place of only self-hence of ultimate torment through total emptiness?

In similar style, could it be that the next world, whether up or down, will not be very different from this one? If, as is sometimes suggested, Heaven is peaches and cream, there will be scant scope for such basic attributes as compassion, empathy and related forms of fellow-feeling. Equally to the point, if one cannot make oneself happy in the here and now, what true hope for the next time around? And if one becomes adept at making oneself miserable through self-preoccupation here, might that also prove fine training for the next world?

After all, if we pray "Thy kingdom come on Earth" and recall that "The kingdom of Heaven is within you", then could there be similar potential for the kingdom of Hell? To this extent, it should not really matter to us here whether there is another life ahead: a life lived to the full, and in the one way that some believe makes that feasible, is surely its own reward.

Yours,
NORMAN MYERS
Honorary Visiting Fellow
Green College
Oxford
12 January

From Dr Richard Ladle
Sir: Contrary to the views of the Church of England's doctrine commission ("Church elders pour cold water on hellfire and damnation", 11 January) many people, as yet unaffected by Christianity, look forward to the "amputation" at the end of a busy life and would consider eternal existence (disconnected or not) as pugnacious.

The commissioners' opinions seem nothing more than whistling in the dark while the monster of modern science breathes heavily in the corner of the room.

After all, if we pray "Thy kingdom come on Earth" and recall that "The kingdom of Heaven is within you", then could there be similar potential for the kingdom of Hell?

To this extent, it should not really matter to us here whether there is another life ahead: a life lived to the full, and in the one way that some believe makes that feasible, is surely its own reward.

Yours (un)faithfully,
RICHARD J. LADLE
London, N1
11 January

DAVID AARONOVITCH

Hell on Earth

Consider this nightmare. The whole country indulges in a 1977 reunion, forced to resume the roles and lives we all led then. Except that we cannot become younger, or shed the experiences of the intervening years. So the elderly Jim Callaghan presides over a tottering cabinet, including Denis Healey, Michael Foot and Shirley Williams. An embittered David Owen is Foreign Secretary.

Margaret leads the Tories, not in her naivety, almost a 1977 incarnation, but as she is now, with recessive gums, thyroïdal eye-bags, and an enormous chip on her shoulder.

In Washington, a decrepit Jimmy Carter is just beginning his stint in the White House.

As if this weren't bad enough, the whole country is invited to hold street parties in a ghastly post-Diana parody of the Queen's Silver Jubilee. British Leyland makes cars, a pontificating Geoff Boycott leads England out against the Aussies, rugby 40-plus footballers with Scouser moustaches pantingly contest the Cup Final, and Virginia Wade creates her way to victory over Chris Evert at Wimbledon.

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Super
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Dazzled by the music and the exotic perfume, Dickie doesn't notice the 'I love Egypt' baseball caps

By Lucy Naylor

How to get there

Lucy Naylor paid £475 (including taxes) for an 8-day cruise with Voyages Jules Verne (0171-723 5066). Numerous companies offer flights and holidays to the Nile with or without cruises. For example, Connections (0171-493 4123) has a one-week holiday departing Gatwick on 19 January, costing £359 including cruise from Luxor to Aswan and back.

How to get in

British visitors to Egypt require a visa, obtainable from the Egyptian Consulate-General; call a premium-rate number, 0891 887777, for details.

Where to seek advice

The Egyptian State Tourist Office is based at 168 Piccadilly, London W1 (0171-493 5282). Foreign Office travel advice for Egypt is available on 0374 500900.

It is midday on day two of my cruise from Aswan to Luxor and back, and I am enjoying being the only person on board who hasn't experienced a World War. The lunch bell sounds – or rather, a waiter tinkles the xylophone. It stirs most people to peel themselves off the deck and head downstairs to the dining room. The unfortunate who can't stomach the idea of food stay sitting in the shade with Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*. Those not reading discuss whether it was the airplane meal what dunnit.

The rest of the 140 people gathered on board the *MS Ra* are playing dividing themselves up into tables – the thrice-daily game of who-to-sit-with. On my table Elizabeth, an imperious 75-year-old, and Rosemary, her pink and portly 50-year-old daughter, start to fall out quite sourly over the history of the Temple of Edfu we visited by horse and cart earlier that day. But the rest of us find we can chat amicably over their heads.

Then, full to the brim of our panamas, we trot back up to the deck to sit in the pool or bubble gently in the jacuzzi. All the while the scenery floats by: the river-hugging strips of sugar cane and palm trees, the desert with unreal mountains of orange sand. "It's like a film, isn't it," murmurs a sunbather as she watches her Egyptian contemporaries washing clothes in the Nile. All those at the water's edge – which is most of the population of Egypt – wave at the boat and inspire a quotation from *Antony and Cleopatra* from Dickie, the Bournemouth bachelor: "The barge she sat in, like a humish'd throne, Burn'd on the water. The poop was beaten gold; Purple the sails..."

The people display tokens of greeting – a large number of which they hope to offload on Dickie and his shipmates for as many Egyptian pounds as possible. But, dazzled by the musical instruments played by young boys, the exotic perfume and sensuous muslin wafted around, Dickie hears no sales pitches nor sees the "I love Egypt" baseball caps. It must have been a doodle of a living for these merchants when there were 200 boats squeezing on to the Nile. With tourist numbers dwindling, it is harder now. But not that hard. Before long the *MS Ra* is draped in

white muslin and smelling of sandalwood beads.

To avoid the really blistering sun, trips to shore are taken when the passengers are barely awake (breakfast, therefore, has the atmosphere of midnight feast). This sometimes hinders us from taking it all in, and we stagger round the Valley of the Queens in a trance-like state.

Night-time is when the boat people really wake up. A 50th birthday cake sets the ball rolling on the first night. On the second night a fancy dress party is announced and a rack of garments produced. I abide by the rule "the older the passenger, the fewer the inhibitions". Middle ground is claimed by a sedate foursome who play bridge in the midst of it all, wearing sensible sheets and tea towels. The evening's mirth is provided by Irene, who tries to sip her cocktail through a sequinned yashmak.

Night four is set aside for belly dancing. Noticeable by his presence is Dickie the bachelorette, who fractured his arm during the previous evening's sound and light show at the Temple of Karnak. A combination of darkness, startling spotlights and 2,000-year-old statues apparently speaking with BBC voices, conspired to make him fall. This has put paid to Dickie's lone excursions to shore, which it is just as well; even one-handed, he is the best belly-dancer the *MS Ra* has ever witnessed. Jo, May and Val accompany him with chorus girl kicks – they are a trio who have cruised the canals of Britain together for a week every year since they finished their School Certificate.

The days and the temples come and go. Never have I come across so much faith in life after death. It's a good dinner-table conversation.

Most of the cruisers say they feel fairly sure there is something up there for them, but wouldn't bet the crown jewels on it like the ancient Egyptians seem to have done. The size of their tombs – and their egos...

Queen Hatshepsut's mortuary temple swims before our eyes in the heat. We climb the steps and at the top, among the pillars, look at the desert stretched out before us. Our smiling silence is broken by squawks of laughter from Jo, May and Val. Dickie is belly-dancing in front of a sphinx. The others aren't sure if it's quite the thing.

Last day but one and Britain is on the horizon. Its memory evoked by a visit Kitchener Island by felucca. It's exhilarating to leave the floating hotel and really sail, touching the water as the boat scuds across the river. Heavier passengers obligingly lean forward when the tilting becomes rather more than is strictly good fun.

Clambering on to the island, we find ourselves once again swamped by the merchants. "Here come the barracudas," warns Henry (dubbed the General), and we all practise the eyes-forward manoeuvre. One

glance at a string of beads and you've had it. It's a difficult 100 yards. The weaker ones fall for a few scarabs, but the rest stride bravely through empty handed. Kitchener Island is a botanical garden of shady delights, and a fine place to stroll. Dickie finds a friend in a cheeky monkey that won't let him go away from its cage without a racket. Rosemary and Elizabeth enjoy a Coca-Cola and a bench under a palm tree.

On the last day there is just time for eleves at the Moorish Old Cataract Hotel in Aswan, where Agatha

Christie wrote her book. We have been told to avoid alcohol during the day, but refusing gin and lemon served by perfectly poised waiters in white linen on the terrace isn't cricket. The General and Rosemary are laughing in a corner, his wife and her mother are in狂歡. Dickie and the school friends are in danger of upsetting the poise of the waiters and being ejected from the terrace. I am talking to silver-bunned Mary. She deftly deflects my questions about the war, orders us another drink and tells me about her next trip across Siberia by train.

LAST RESORT Mbuzini, South Africa

by Thecla Schreuders

Visitors to South Africa's Kruger National Park in the Eastern Transvaal are probably unaware that they are in witchcraft country. The well-tended camps of the game reserve and the abundant timber and fruit plantations in the surrounding low veld give the impression of an ordered country. But, as with most things in South Africa, traditional practices are integrally linked to this picture. If problems arise – illness, conflict, misfortune – witchcraft is suspected and a witchdoctor is the obvious source of relief.

If you venture south off the national road between Johannesburg and Mozambique and away from the tourist resorts and commercial centres, you're in a wholly different cultural landscape. The Transvaal had been experiencing an epidemic of "witch"

killing and I was there working on a film about a powerful witchdoctor. His home-stead is at a place called Mbuzini in the furthest corner of the Eastern Transvaal.

Mpapane is 72 years old.

He has 14 wives and upwards of 60 children, and he's still going strong. His clients travel to this remote spot from all over southern Africa for his renowned skills in divination and herbal medicine.

Our first trip up to Mbuzini seemed interminable; we turned off the national road and for a while travelled through corn and sisal fields.

Then we headed into the hills and left tarmac for gravel and the sort of roads for which you should have a sturdy vehicle if you want your internal organs to remain unscrambled. After about an hour, we crested the line of hills in clouds of red dust and saw Mbuzini spread out before us.

It isn't a town so much as a small agricultural settlement. Mpapane is one of the wealthiest men of the district, with so many wives and children, he has plenty of labour for his fields and numerous apprentices for his practice. On the edge of his cornfield is a clearing in which stands an ancient tree, hung with the ragged garments of accused witches.

A steady stream of clients turns up at Mpapane's home-

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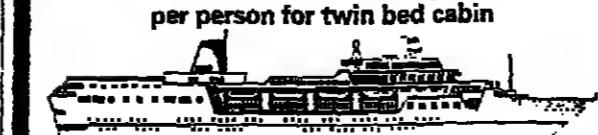
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Mpapane the witch doctor and his assistant Photo: Joanna Head

stead for treatment of various physical and metaphysical complaints and will often stay for several days. But there is no cosy inn or motel for them.

The closest thing to a public amenity is the "shebeen", or bar lounge, which sells beer and Coca-Cola.

If you want to make a trip up to Mbuzini and need to stay for a few days, the best thing is to make friends with the proprietor of the supermarket, who may help you out. But it's easy enough to make day trips up from any of the luxury hotels bordering the Kruger Park, such as the Malelane Sun Lodge (where crocodile stirrups are common fare), or even from Nelspruit, the regional capital, which is two hours away. There, you can stay at the Paragon Hotel, an appropriately named Victorian throwback, and sip iced coffees at the poolside. The contrast with Mbuzini couldn't be more marked.

The Witching Tree, part of BBC2's "Under the Sun" series, Wednesday, 9.30pm.

DEPARTURES

Chay Blyth's Grand Tour sets sail in 1998 on a 30-month voyage aboard a fleet of 67ft sailing yachts. The trip is divided into 15 separate voyages. An eight-week journey in May/June 1999 begins in Tokyo and extends along the line of the Aleutian islands and around the Gulf of Alaska before sailing south to Vancouver. This sector costs £11,820.

The last leg of the journey, in May/June 2000, sails north from Iceland to the Norwegian island of Svalbard (Spitzbergen), returning to Tower Bridge in London. The cost for these final eight weeks is £9,691. The trip is organised by Challenge Business International (01579 348387).

The first charter flights from Gatwick to Damascus begin on Valentine's Day. From 14 February to 22 May, Voyages Jules Verne (0171-616 1000) will run a programme of holidays based on the flights, taking in Syria and Jordan. The price of £595 excludes visa fees and airport taxes. Single supplement is £165.

One year from now, you could be touching down in Britain after a fortnight of wildlife photography in the Falkland Islands. Photo Travellers (01483 425448) is organising the trip, which costs £3,295. Because of the restrictions of the British Norman Islander aircraft that will ferry the photo-tourists around, numbers are limited to eight.

A kite strong enough to pull you along the beach is offered by Natural Heights (0181-682 8980), a specialist activity operator based in Burgau on Portugal's Algarve coast. As well as revealing the differences between quadrifoils and power kites, the company also offers horse-riding, cycling and juggling. In West Africa, Kitebreaks Gambia (01432 264206) offers an all-in package of £26 per day for accommodation, meals and kite instruction (flights are extra). The venue is Rasta Kunda, a locally owned and operated tourist encampment.

A Mediterranean holiday for under £15 per person is being offered in the new

brouchure from Eurosities (01706 830888). Two adults and four children travelling to one of the company's sites on the Costa Brava or Costa Dorada pay a total of £85 in late April. This includes ferry travel between Ramsgate and Dunkerque; you have to bring your own car. In peak season, the total rises to £490 – £82 per person. Eurosities also has holidays by the Med in France and Italy.

The big package holiday trend for summer '96 is the all-inclusive holiday – but it is by no means a new idea. Club Mark Warner (0171-393 3131) has had a 20-year start on most of the travel industry in providing holidays where everything from breakfast to boardsailing is included in the price. At the secluded Mark Warner Clubhotel Cap d'Or, on the Greek Peloponnese across the water from Spetses, a high-season week costs £1,306. This includes flights, meals and activities. Use of VIP lounge at Gatwick on the outward leg is available for the modest extra sum of £20.

The naturist holiday company Peng Travel (01708 471832) celebrates its silver jubilee this summer. The firm is based in Romford, but offers clothes-free holidays around the Mediterranean. In Spain, naturist resorts are located on the coast of Andalucia – notably the purpose-built Costa Natura, near Gibraltar. The main resort, however, is Cap d'Agde on the Mediterranean coast of France. Six nights, travelling by coach from Britain, costs between £185 and £453, depending on dates and accommodation.

To follow in Rupert Brooke's pen strokes, book a place at one of the Writer's Workshop weeks on the island of Skyrus in the Sporades. The Skyrus Centre (0171-267 4424 or e-mail skyrus@easynet.co.uk) has recruited authors such as DM Thomas, Sue Townsend and Jill Neville to teach creative writing on the island. Prices range from £495 to £755, excluding air fares from Britain, but discounts of up to 15 per cent are offered to people who have taken holidays with Skyrus in the past.



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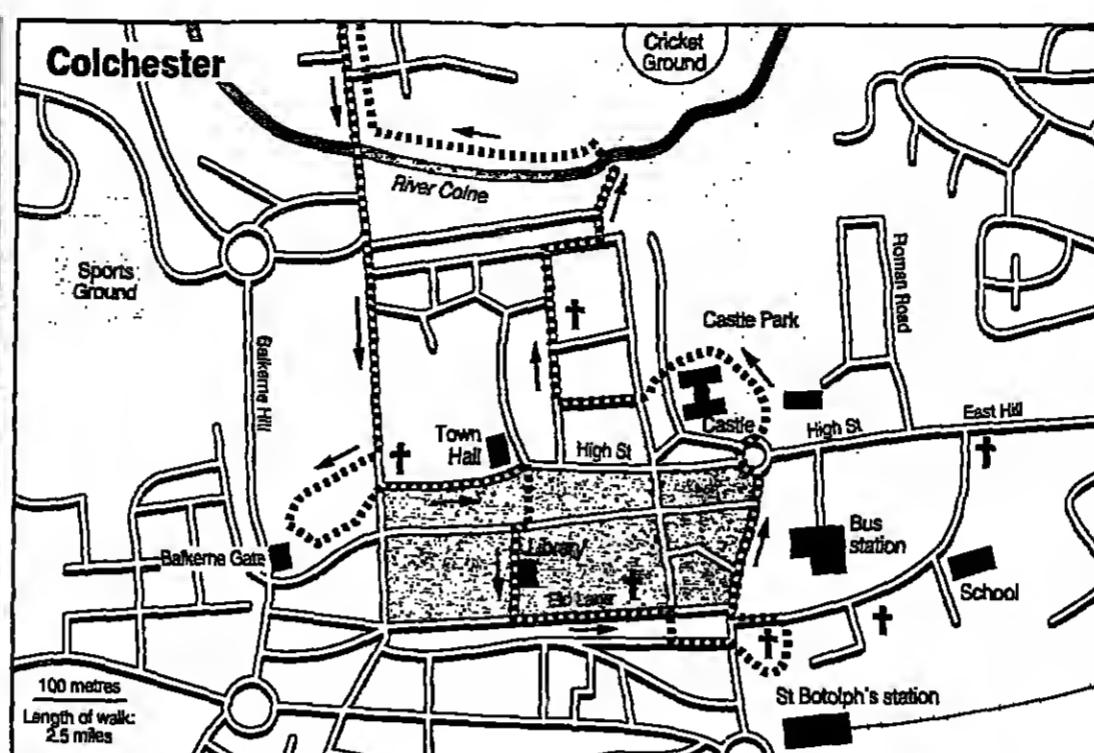
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TRAILS OF THE UNEXPECTED COLCHESTER

The capital of Romantic Essex

A Roman arch outside Colchester castle
Photo: Jane Baker

By Andrew John Davies

Chuck away the labels "Essex Man" and "Essex Girl". One of England's largest counties, Essex is stuffed full of timber churches, enchanting villages and picturesque riverside ramblings. Take Colchester, for example, our oldest recorded town. The Romans set up their first capital here in AD43 when Emperor Claudius came marching over from Rome, accompanied by elephants, to accept the surrender of 11 British kings. But if the Roman legacy is apparent throughout the town, so, too, are the 200 elegant Georgian houses. Intrusions of the modern world, namely the vile concrete blocks of Essex University, are mercifully segregated on a distant campus.

The main railway station is some way from the town. Walk up North Hill towards the centre and your eye will be irre-

sistibly drawn towards a massive red-brick structure dominating the skyline. This is Jumbo, the old Victorian water tower named after a famous African elephant and now due for conversion into apartments. The weather vane still displays an elephant.

Nearby is the Balkerne Gate, the largest surviving Roman gateway in Britain. Its massive ness shows how the Romans securely girded the town with fortifications after Boudicca had razed the previous settlement to the ground in AD61.

Much of the original two-mile stretch of wall, some nine inches thick, is still visible. Near by is the Mercury Theatre and also an arts centre in an old church. Colchester endured an 11-week siege during the Civil War in 1648. The Royalists set up a large cannon here on St Mary's which they called Humpty Dumpty. It was eventually

demolished by the Parliamentary forces, giving us the rhyme: "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again".

Walk towards the High Street and admire the straight and broad roads, another Roman legacy. Saunter through the ground floor colonnade of what was once the Corn Exchange down towards the splendid Town Hall of 1902. This Edwardian extravaganza at its best, topped by St Helena, the town's patron saint.

Further down the tower are four figures representing Colchester's main industries: fisheries, agriculture, engineering and the military.

Every year the mayor holds an Oyster Feast here at which invited guests sit down to quaff the local speciality. A recent European Union ban on one particular chemical has encouraged the revival of the industry.

The Romans were partial to oysters or Colchester Natives – their shells have even been excavated in Rome.

On the other side of the High Street is the charming Red Lion Hotel with a frontage of about 1500. Go through the nearby alley towards the Social History Museum located in another converted church.

Close by but set back from Trinity Street is a real find, namely Tymerley's Clock Museum in a 15th-century timber-framed house. The fine array of clocks, quite apart from their functional value, are objects of beauty. Make sure you are there on the hour when they chime and ring in a magical orchestral symphony.

Turn down Eld Lane and then along attractive Vineyard Street. At the end on the right are the remnants of the medieval St Botolph's Priory, severely dam-

aged during the Civil War siege, but whose impressive west front has a fine Norman arch.

Turn up Queen Street, past yet more Roman walls, towards the Natural History Museum in yet one more ex-church. I dare you to go inside and plunge your hand deep into the Feely Box and grope the insects. On the other side of the road is the exquisite Hollytrees of 1718, now a museum devoted to domestic bygones.

Close by is Colchester Castle which proudly boasts the largest keep or central tower anywhere in England – much bigger than the White Tower at the Tower of London. The Norman castle was built on what had been the Roman Temple of Claudius. Never ones to waste building materials, the Normans incorporated the hands of Roman red brick.

Castle Park is an excellent

place to stroll. Leave by the Ryegate Road exit and enter one of England's best-kept secrets, the Dutch Quarter where several hundred Dutch and Flemish refugees set up in the late 16th century, bringing with them their expert weaving skills. The overhanging upper storeys of the houses are a delight.

Make your way through to the river Colne, the reason why the town sprang up here in the first place. Delicacies were once shipped from here back to Rome, including our much-prized greyhounds. Stroll along the riverside until you reach the bridge in North Station Road. Turn right back towards the station.

In 1907 a Mr RA Beckett published *Romantic Essex*. "The spell of a magic Past, carelessly hidden beneath a prosaic Present, this is the spell of Colchester". Mr Beckett was right.

UK DEPARTURES

Basil Fawley must be fuming: Bournemouth is going all-out for the non-smoking trade. Its new visitor's brochure (available on 01202 451700) details three stretches of tobacco-free beach in the Dorset resort, and features a hotel – the Shelley Villa (01202 302400) – for non-smokers only. A week of half-board costs £159; and if the telephone is too primitive a form of communication, you can e-mail the place at shelleyvilla@bournemouth-net.co.uk.

Further north in Dorset, Hardy souls can take part in a guided walk through Thomas Hardy's countryside every Wednesday and Sunday, departing at 10am from the Town Pump in Dorchester. You visit the writer's birthplace at Higher Bockhampton and the home at Max Gate where he lived for 40 years. The eight-mile walk concludes with afternoon tea, which is not included in the cost of £5.

Shropshire County Council has launched a series of walks based at Clinton and Coverdale, which are available from local tourist information centres for a suggested donation to the Shropshire Wildlife Trust of 20p.

Oxford to Cambridge for under £4, or London to Edinburgh for £13.50 – these are the best back-to-college fares of the academic year. They are the standard rates of the lift-share agency Freewalkers (0191-222 0094). Prospective passengers have to pay £10 to register initially, and drivers £5. For the first time in the UK, a lift-share scheme is being commercially supported (by Avis, Midland Bank, Vauxhall and the YHA), which should enhance its chances of success.

The new cut-price airline linking Scotland and England, EasyJet (01582 445566), has begun services between Aberdeen and Luton. Tickets only from the airline.

Arnie the stallion lumbered forward, the towrope shot a line of spray and we set off down the Rochdale Canal

By Muthena Paul Alkazraji

A final word on safety before we set off," said our guide for the half-hour horse-drawn narrowboat excursion up the Rochdale Canal. "Please don't go out on deck: there isn't one." Arnie, the Ardenne stallion, dutifully lumbered forward, the towrope shot a line of spray from the water as it tightened, and we jolted away from the marina's edge, en route from Hebden Bridge, along the Calder Valley, to Britain's last remaining clog factory.

In 1887 the Rochdale Canal Company operated an express cargo service from Manchester to Sowerby Bridge: more than 30 miles and 92 locks in 36 hours, with the crew snatching six hours rest. But now Arnie was setting the pace. The original boatmen, by reputation a rough-living, hard-drinking bunch, transported coal, timber, wool and cotton along this, one of three trans-Pennine canals, throughout the Industrial Revolution. This afternoon the rudderman, Paul Jackson, and his crew (wearing clogs and Victorian boatman's costume) contained themselves to the occasional drag on a roll-up.

We navigated an imposing lock at Mayroyd Mill, and later scraped under a number of stone bridges that Mr Jackson told me had knocked disengaged crew members into the water on a number of occasions. "Prior to Arnie, we had a Shire horse called Corkie," he smiled. "He fell in, too, and just lay there quite happily, eating weed."

Later, a crew member lay back on the top of the boat with his feet on the tunnel roof and "legged" us out alongside the tow-path opposite Walkley Clogs – a multi-storey Victorian mill sitting grandly between the canal and the River Calder.

Clog soles have been produced continuously on this site since 1870, but the complete clog-making process



En route to the Walkley clog factory

versmiths, spinners, furniture makers and toy sellers. There is also a Calder Valley history museum and restaurant selling roast beef and Yorkshire pudding – what else?

Hebden Bridge itself, a 10 minute walk back along the canal, having developed into a thriving textile town in the last century, has retained and renovated its architectural heritage. Its mills, walls cleaned of industrial dirt and clad in ivy, now house numerous artists' studios and craftspeople's workshops which have earned it the nickname "St Ives of the North". Much of the top and bottom housing, built to provide homes for its textile workers, can still be seen precipitously stacked along the steep hillsides.

Hebden Bridge's most

famous son, Sir Bernard Ingaham, was educated at the local Grammar School. Mrs Thatcher's chief press-secretary, a man not to be crossed by all accounts, apparently wears clogs and gets them from Walkley's. Before leaving, I glanced through their catalogue and discovered it was technically possible to order a blue, suede jackboot. "Now this style rather suits Sir Bernard" I could hear the assistant say.

Hebden Bridge Tourist Information: 01422 843531. Calder Valley Cruising: 01422 845557 (cruises to the clog factory start in April). Walkley Clogs: 01422 842061 – open every day except Christmas and Boxing days. Adults £1, children free.

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No carbon dioxide, no problem...

At least that's the theory for natural gas as the fuel of the future. But are we ready for it? By Gavin Green

It was good last week to see Steven Norris, VW dealer turned transport minister, endorsing the natural gas powered bus which has just started to ply the streets of Bristol. Perhaps a cleaner bus can also attract a cleaner, more respectable clientele, and persuade Mr Norris - who, famously, doesn't much care for bus passengers - to use it.

Natural gas looks like being the fuel of our post-petrol transport future. It has the potential to be 100 times less polluting than current petrol/diesel vehicles and some car manufacturers - traditionally coy on the subject - are suggesting that gas is probably the way to go.

The environmental advantages of natural gas over unleaded petrol are manifold. It is less toxic when burnt by an internal combustion engine, winning on carbon monoxide emissions (about 20 per cent of petrol's); oxides of nitrogen (70 per cent); hydrocarbons (40 per cent) and sulphur dioxide, the main cause of acid (natural gas produces none, diesel is particularly appalling). Cities, which suffer most from exhaust toxins, are likely to be far better off. The world beyond should also be a better place; natural gas, when burnt, produces less carbon dioxide (CO₂), the main greenhouse-effect gas.

Further advantages are its ubiquity (the earth is richest in natural gas) and that a distribution and extraction industry is already in place. There are world economic advantages, too: Russia is the world's biggest producer, with something like 38 per cent of known natural gas reserves. And nothing would help international political and economic stability like an injection of hard currency Moscow-way.

So why don't the motor and oil industries start changing their industries accordingly? After all, converting a current car to run on



For better or worse: the new gas-powered bus in Bristol

CNG (compressed natural gas) is easy. Many cars in many countries - 300,000 in Italy, most taxis - have already been converted.

Well, natural gas is not all scents and sensible theory. Its major environmental problem is what's called "methane slip". Methane, which typically makes up about 95 per cent of natural gas, is the most virulent greenhouse-effect gas of all. It's about 30 times worse than CO₂. Although burning it does the earth a favour, all current CNG vehicles let more methane escape through the combustion process than engineers would like. There is also methane loss into the atmosphere during gas extraction and refuelling the car. The upshot

is that despite the potential greenhouse benefit, the result may be a penalty of simply replacing CO₂ with methane, something worse.

CNG is also a less energy-dense fuel, which means you need more to do a given mileage. One of the attractions of petrol is that so little of it gets you so far. Per volume, petrol has about three times more energy than CNG. Plus the CNG tank - which is storing gas under high pressure - needs to be much heavier. A typical CNG fuel tank for a car weighs about 70kg - the equivalent of carrying an extra man's mass.

Probably Britain's most outspoken champion of CNG is Jim

Randle, former chief engineer of Jaguar and now Professor of Automotive Engineering at Birmingham University. Professor Randle believes CNG will start to achieve "real popularity" for private cars in Britain in about 10 years.

The major environmental benefits will come when specially designed engines, better suited to CNG, are available. Professor Randle predicts that with technological advances by the year 2010, the best engine will be a gas turbine, which he believes would be 100 times more ecologically friendly than today's catalytic equipped petrol car. The turbine would, in effect, act as an on-

board generator powering a bank of batteries supplying electricity to four little electric engines (one in each wheel). It sounds hulky, but the total weight and size of mechanicals would be no greater than the engine and transmission of today's cars.

Professor Randle and quite a few top car company engineers reckon this could be the state of the art production car in about 20 years.

Beyond that? Hydrogen, say most experts, is the fuel of our long-term transport future (no pollution and it comes from water). Until then, as Bristol is beginning to find out, natural gas should do nicely.

road test Mercedes-Benz E-class

Mercedes-Benz make the best cars in the world. They produce the most thoroughly engineered, solid and safe cars which are among the world's most desirable. It's just such a shame the new ones are so ugly.

Sure, there have been some beauties, such as the latest SL sports car, and most old Mercedes sports models. The recently superseded E-class, Mercedes' most popular model, is a timeless design, looking homogenous from any angle. The latest S-class, although beautifully wrought and untruly comfortable, looks like a failed shed with its slab sides and ungainly height.

But worse of all is the new E-class. It is a real bits-and-pieces design with three different philosophies thrown together: four little headlamps and fetchingly sculpted front end at odds with the traditional rectangular grille alongside; unappealing flat sides contrasting with the rounded front and a generic Japanese tail, with lamps that look like they are off last year's Toyota.

Fortunately, it drives well: strong and solid, unfailingly stable even in cross winds and heavy rain. There is noticeable improvement in steering feel (the old E's helm always felt a little dead), in the smoothness of the automatic transmission's shift, and in banding. The basic E200 version is surprisingly sprightly, thanks to engine improvements. There's also substantially more rear room.

On the downside, the new car doesn't feel quite as well made. Its switchgear, for instance, is not as chunky, being mostly the same sort of hollow plastic that you get with Ford, Vauxhall or Rover.

Some of the old-world touches about the old E are also missing - such as the hinged arm rest for the front seats. Now you rest your elbows on the padded centre console, as with every other



Specifications

Mercedes-Benz E200 Elegance auto £27,402. 1998cc, four cylinder engine 136bhp, top speed 128mph, 0-60mph 12 seconds.

Rivals

Audi A6 2.6 Quattro £22,690 Much cheaper, model for model, than the Mercedes and just as good to drive. Well made too, if not quite as substantial.

BMW 520i SE £22,200 New model coming in the spring, but the old one handles and rides well, and is the best made car in the class, after the Mercedes. Cramped rear, though.

Rover 827 SI £23,495 Quicker, better equipped than the Benz, but nothing like the overall integrity.

Saab 9000CDE 2.0i £22,645 Roomy, individualistic, comfortable, but not as solid as the Benz.

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Don't panic: the owner-occupiers are coming

January has become an active month for sales. And this year there's a new breed of young buyer on the move. By Anne Spackman

Andrew Mancas (pictured with his girlfriend Bridget Scott), the director of Winkworth's office in the West End of London, will save £300 per month when he buys a similar flat to the one he is renting
Photograph: Philip Meech

It may be because of central heating, it may be because Christmas is the only time when busy families can sit down and take decisions, but whatever the reason, January is no longer the ugly sister of the property year. For the fourth year in succession, estate agents have opened their doors to a steady stream of enquiries from potential buyers and sellers. But this year there are two significant changes. First, the January activity follows on from an already improved November and December – for some agents their busiest months of 1995. Second, the seasonal batch of sales by divorcees is being added to by a number of first-time buyers.

It seems that with rents going up and interest rates going down, the property pendulum is finally swinging towards owner occupation for the generation in their twenties. Winkworth, the London chain with 32 branches across the capital, is reporting interest from first-time buyers in one-bedroom and even studio flats, which for the past five years have been almost unsellable.

Andrew Mancas, the 28-year-old director of Winkworth's West End office, is himself buying for the first time this month. He and his girlfriend are purchasing a flat the same size and in the same square in Baron's Court where they are currently renting. Taking his mortgage and all monthly payments into account he will be at least £300 a month better off. "Interest rates are coming



down and the cost of renting is going up by between five and seven per cent a year," he said. "I think prices are steady and there are now so many good mortgage deals around that it is a good time to buy." His office has just had its busiest ever November and December.

Winkworth's Kensington branch has also had its busiest December for years. Andrew Cooper, who works there, has himself decided to join the ranks of first-timers. "There is a new generation of buyers coming through, like me," he said. "With interest rates so reasonable the time seems right to look around."

Two women featured on these pages last year as committed to renting have also decided to join the ranks of New Year first-time buyers. In a complete reversal of the traditional situation,

they found they could live far better as owner-occupiers than as tenants. They can no longer afford to rent.

The first-timers are emerging more strongly in London than in other cities, where rents have yet to rise as a result of increased demand. But signs of life are apparent in the property market everywhere.

The latest quarterly report from the Land Registry, based on the vast majority of house sales in England and Wales, confirms building society reports that house prices began to rise during the summer of 1995. The Land Registry figures include transactions without mortgages, which are now thought to account for almost one in five sales.

The only category of property to fall in value between July and September of

last year was new flats, where average prices fell 0.5 per cent. For terraces, semi-detached and detached homes, prices rose by between two and four per cent. A regional breakdown of the figures proves the case that the quality market is performing best. Detached and semi-detached houses in Greater London have seen the greatest price increases. Prices for semi-detached and terraced houses in most other regions rose fractionally, while flat prices fell slightly in the North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, the West and East Midlands, the South West and the South East.

This year looks set to continue the trend for good houses to outperform the mass market, with the agents who sell the more expensive houses taking the

most calls. Patrick Ramsay of Knight Frank (as the 100-year-old institution of Knight Frank & Rutley is now known) believes the property market has shifted a few months forward. He said: "From the first of January until the end of May has been the best selling season for the past three or four years. Once people have got their children back to school they roll up their sleeves and get on with it. But there is still the benefit of the seasons from the point of view of the garden looking its best," he added. "There will always be an element of houses which are best launched between April and May."

Edward Waterson, who runs Carter Jonas's York office, has seen an encouraging number of new purchasers since the New Year. "We did an analysis of why people were buying, and relocation was the number one reason," he said. "People moving jobs often like to spend Christmas in their old home. It's a big change from my father's day, when estate agents virtually shut up shop between Christmas and Easter."

His colleague in Cambridge, Richard Hatch, is recommending that would-be sellers of quality country houses put their properties up for sale now, rather than wait for the spring. "They don't need to look their best in order to sell well because there is such a shortage of supply," he said, "but it is a bonus to have pictures of how it looks in the summer."

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Hartest Mill is a house for grown-ups. Converted from a flour-grinding mill by an antiques dealer, it is a spacious, predominantly open-plan home with quality fittings which would be unlikely to suit a family with young children. The property sits in gardens with stepped ornamental pools at the end of a private drive in this smart village about eight miles south of Bury St Edmunds. It has a sitting-room, library area, dining-room, kitchen/breakfast room, galleried study, two and a half bedrooms and two bathrooms. Bedford Country Property Agents (01284 769999) is asking for offers in the region of £195,000.

For what it's worth

Employees of the newly emerged Scottish Courage group relocating to Edinburgh from the south-east of England are using the Internet to search for new homes. Information rooms have been set up in Staines and Reading by The Property Wave, which publishes property information on the Internet. People can access property details with colour photographs as well as information on specific neighbourhoods, schools and arts events. Gordon Kerr of Morton Fraser Relocation said the initial response to the service was terrific and he expected it to become a standard part of the relocation process. Property details, however, had not turned out to be as crucial as statistics on the weather – the subject that most worried employees moving north.

Who's moving

The home of Brigadier Anthony Wingfield, the distinguished Second World War soldier and former racing manager to the Queen, is to be sold at auction, following his death last month. Brigadier Wingfield, who was awarded the MC and a DSO, retired to Ireland for a life of horses and farming. His home, Brownstown Park, is in prime hunting country 26 miles from Dublin. The Georgian house with five main bedrooms, 26 acres and 10 horse boxes is being auctioned by Hamilton Osborne King on 27 February with a guide price of £1.380,000 (£375,000).

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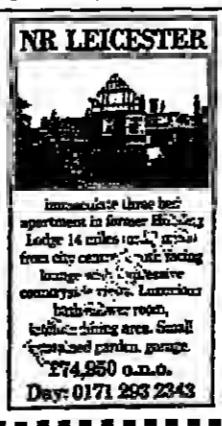
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money

Most savings and investment decisions involve assessing odds. Salivating about the size of a potential prize is not the way to achieve the best result

What is one to make of the remarkable success of the National Lottery? Leave aside the moral issues for a moment, and forget about what impact it is having on the British economy, dramatic though that is. What does the remarkable response to last weekend's roll-over jackpot tell us about the British public's attitude to money?

What it tells us is surely not entirely flattering. As many commentators have correctly pointed out, the trouble with the Lottery is that, even by the undemanding standards of gambling, it is a very bad way to wager money.

The odds on winning the jackpot (at nearly 14 million to one) are spectacularly poor.

You can do much better even on the pools, and better still by putting your money into boring old Premium Bonds, which not only give you better odds of a significant prize (the top prize is £1m), but also have the added advantage that you do not have to surrender your stake each week.

As our sister paper, the *Independent on Sunday*, reported last week, something like 50,000 individuals now have the maximum allowable holding of £20,000 in Premium Bonds.

I can vouch for the fact that they include some very savvy people. Sir Patrick Sergeant, who founded the phenomenally successful magazine business, Euromoney, is one of them, and there are many more.

And yet, despite the elementary numerical logic, which shows there are much better ways to gamble with your money, the Lottery continues to absorb the attentions of the public on a scale that no single other form of gambling has ever managed to do in this country.

According to brokers Kleinwort Benson, the impact of the Lottery has been such that the proportion of national income that Britain now spends on gambling and betting has jumped by something like 50 per cent in little over a year.

It is now back to the peak level it achieved in the very early 1970s. (The 1960s were the last great heyday of popular gambling in this country.)

Nor is there any mystery about what has caused the success of the Lottery. The lure of huge jackpots is undoubtedly the factor that has made the most difference. The columnist Christopher Fulcher pointed out acutely the other day that this should come as no surprise to anyone.

The phenomenon was accurately predicted more than 200 years ago by the economist Adam Smith, whose own careful analysis of the subject led him to conclude that it was the size of the maximum payout, not the chance of winning, that was the critical factor in the popularity of any lottery. The bigger the top prize, the keener everyone will be to play – a phenomenon that last week's events have duly confirmed.

And this despite the fact – which is obvious enough when you think about it – that the more popular the lottery is, the worse your odds of winning any given prize become.

The bigger the prize, in other words, the more blind to the odds most punters become.

Take this phenomenon to an economist, and he will tell you that as individuals our risk-reward profile is very heavily skewed towards

the single big pay-off. Given the choice between gambling to win £1m today and aiming for 10 separate wins of £150,000 each at better odds, we tend to prefer to go for the former. How far this is a conscious and irrational decision – "I know the odds, but I don't care" – and how far it is simply ignorance – "I don't know what the odds are, but now that you point it out, I see what you mean" – is a matter of conjecture.

But it is hard not to see the phenomenon as a symptom of a wider problem that people in Britain have with the way they approach money issues.

Most savings and investment decisions are, at bottom, decisions that involve assessing odds, and they need to be approached in the same way as any other decision of that kind.

Letting the blood rush to your head, or salivating about the size of a potential prize, is not the way to achieve the best results over time.

With some notable exceptions, such as wartime, or severe economic crises such as the one we suffered in the mid-1970s, the odds for those with long-term funds to invest clearly favour putting the money into equities rather than keeping them in the bank or build-

ing society. The cumulative difference in returns over a period of years, given the magic of compound interest, is potentially dramatic (although the sudden flurry of building society mergers and floatations, with their windfall payouts, has done something to redress the balance in the last year or so).

Nor do you have to be very good at picking stocks to obtain the extra performance from investing in equities.

Any fund that mirrors the performance of the market as a whole, provided it has a diversified portfolio and does not eat up all your gains in charges, will capture most of the potential gain from being in shares rather than having your money in a savings account.

The risk is greater, of course, but more than compensated for by the additional return.

And yet, when it comes to picking shares, many investors spend a great deal of time hunting for the potential market-beater that will knock spots off most ordinary shares with a quick gain of 100 per cent or 200 per cent.

It may be more fun that way, but it is not a very rational thing to do. But then the Lottery experience shows that rationality is not always the first thing that comes to mind when money is at stake.

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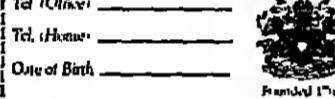
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The winners and losers in Woolwich's bonanza

Speculators shut out by the retrospective cut-off date are likely to be the most aggrieved. By Nic Cicuti

After months of suspense, Woolwich Building Society finally confirmed the predictions of every pundit in the land. It announced this week that it plans to float the society on the Stock Exchange, ensuring a shares windfall worth up to £1,000 for some 3.5 million Woolwich savers and shareholders.

The band-outs are expected to take place in the autumn of next year. Before then, members will have the chance to vote on whether they want Woolwich to abandon its mutual status. In theory, the vote could still go against the deal.

But the experience of previous floatations and takeovers suggests that the vast majority of members are prepared to sacrifice the indeterminate benefits of mutuality for cash, or shares, in hand.

Those who stand to gain are the society's 600,000 mortgage borrowers plus holders of Share, Prime Gold, Premier 90, Tessa, Premium Investment, Fixed Rate Bonds, Cashbase and Sharesave accounts.

Other saving schemes, including but not exclusively various Super 60 and Super 90 accounts, are among the beneficiaries. Woolwich savers will be told whether

they are eligible if they call a special hotline – 0345 022033. Calls will be charged at local rates.

The most obvious losers are the 400,000-plus savers with Woolwich current accounts. They are not deemed to be members, as are the 80,000 investors with a Woolwich unit trust or PEP product, those who have taken out a general insurance policy or with some types of pension top-up products.

The losers likely to generate the most heat will be those who rushed to open a share account with Woolwich between 31 December and Thursday morning, when the announcement was made.

"Carpetbaggers", as they were dubbed by Woolwich this week, have in effect been disenfranchised by the society's decision to set a retrospective cut-off date of 31 December to have opened an account.

Woolwich justifies its action by pointing out that in the final week before its announcement, the level of new account openings rocketed 20-fold compared with normal.

About 30,000 new savers lost out in the speculative surge and they will be angry at the way the door was suddenly shut in their face. They won't get much sympathy from other Woolwich members, or most other people, though.

This applies particularly to those predators hoping to move on to the next building society targets.

Alliance & Leicester is the next likely society to de-mutualise but it has already raised its minimum stake for membership to £5,000 excepting investors in an A&L Tessa account, who need only to come up with the £1,000 minimum in order to sneak past the society's gatekeepers.

Nationwide is a far longer-term prospect, if you believe its own propaganda about commitment to mutuality. If not, now is the time to act.

After that, enigma reigns. Other building societies are regarded by most analysts as too small to float on their own. But that still raises the possibility of mergers or takeovers followed by floatations. Plus, a number of big financial institutions are known to be in the market for good, medium-sized building societies.

For those prepared to take a punt on such a possibility, the most likely targets are Bradford & Bingley, Britannia, Bristol & West, Birmingham Midshires and Portman. Even so, we are now moving away from the world of dead certs and into the realms of speculation in every sense. Happy hunting.

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The fund managers who just keep on tracking

They're cheap, simple to understand and are all the rage. But are tracker funds the best way to manage a portfolio? By Alison Eadie

Index tracker funds are all the rage. Low charges and performance as good as, if not better than, many actively managed funds are proving highly seductive to investors.

The concept, pioneered in the UK by HSBC Asset Management, sounds deceptively simple. Instead of trying to outperform a stock market index, a tracker fund is designed to match it through buying most or all of the constituent companies in their correct weightings.

But just as there are many methods of active fund management, quantitative analysts who set up and monitor tracker funds have different systems.

James Capel Quantitative Techniques in Edinburgh advises 30 tracker funds, including seven unit trusts, for its parent company HSBC. The seven range from the flagship UK Index Fund, which tracks the FT All-Share index, to the exotic Tiger Index Fund, which tracks an index of Capel's own design representing the markets of Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia.

Adrian Tupper, a senior quantitative analyst at Capel, explains that, far from being passive, tracker fund investment offers a choice of what stocks to hold and how to monitor and rebalance them to ensure they stay in line with the index. The first choice is whether to replicate an index in full or in part. HSBC opts for partial replication in five of its tracker funds as it works out cheaper, administratively simpler and just as effective in performance terms.

"Two things move an

index - weight and performance," Mr Tupper says. To put as much of the weight of the index in the fund as possible, larger stocks are replicated in full and smaller stocks sampled. The UK Index Fund holds 350 stocks, including the largest 200, which account for close to 90 per cent of the value of the All-Share index. The 150 smaller companies are chosen to ensure the fund has the correct sector spread to match the index.

Pharmaceutical companies tend to be big, so buying the top 200 companies would almost arrive at the correct pharmaceutical weighting. However, building companies tend to be small, so the fund would need to top up among smaller building stocks to get the right sector fit. In theory companies should move in line with their sector, so if sector allocation is right the fund should track the index.

"Once you get away from full replication, you are taking a risk," admits Mr Tupper. But he adds that buying all 900 stocks in the All-Share would involve higher dealing and custodial charges, as custodians charge for every single communication on dividends, rights issues, annual shareholder meetings and so forth.

The Tiger Fund holds 165 stocks out of a possible 270, weighted equally between the eight markets covered. It is rebalanced monthly, so if Hong Kong has risen to account for 13 per cent of the index after a month, the additional 0.5 per cent is sold.

The index is a slight oddity, Mr Tupper admits. Most Asia Pacific funds are heavily weighted towards Hong Kong, the region's

largest stock market and have smaller allocations for the smaller markets. The equal country weighting of the Tiger Fund means that smaller markets such as Taiwan and South Korea have greater influence than their market capitalisation would dictate.

With only around 15 stocks to choose from in the Philippines, sector sampling is not possible. Even in the larger Asian markets with 40 or 50 stocks to choose from, sector sampling is mathematically difficult, Mr Tupper points out.

Countries take the place of sectors, but the exercise of rebalancing to make sure each market stays at 12.5 percent of the fund is the same.

Liquidity can pose problems to tracker funds. As the Tiger index is calculated and managed by Capel, it only adds stock that can be bought and sold easily by foreign investors. But Mr Tupper admits that in the Far East liquid stocks can fall out of favour and spend six months barely trading or can be suspended. The solution is to pick the next stock on the list. "This is the beauty of a sampled index," he maintains. A fully replicated tracker fund would be stuck.

Capel's seven-year experience of developing a database of international equities, indices and currencies gives it the confidence to rely on its own indexation software. It believes its partial replication technique is the best, but there are other methods. The two most common are optimisation and stratified sampling.

Capel dismisses optimisation as it is based on assumptions of history repeating itself. "We don't know the future perfor-

mance of an index, so we won't use past performance," Mr Tupper says. Stratified sampling is also dismissed as "too unsophisticated", as it does not allow for the smaller companies effect and the choice of stocks is to a large extent arbitrary.

Setting up a tracker fund is only the beginning. There must be careful monitoring of additions and deletions to the index, takeovers, rights, scrip issues and other corporate events that can potentially put tracking off course.

The recent takeover of Norweb by North West Water gave shareholders four choices: all cash; cash and shares; cash, shares and National Grid exchangeable bonds; or cash and National Grid bonds.

Capel's job in such cases is to advise fund managers what action to take.

Some indices are harder to track than others. "The more money in the fund the easier the index is to track as you can buy more stocks," Mr Tupper says. UK Index has £167m under management against Tiger's £31.7m. Tiger is also tougher because it follows eight separate markets.

The arguments for tracker funds hinge on cost and performance. Tracker funds have lower dealing and management costs and can sell to the retail market for less. In the past three years they have also done as well as if not better than almost three-quarters of UK active fund managers that failed to beat the All-Share index. The scope for active fund managers to add value is greater in less mature markets like small company and emerging markets. So the Tiger Fund has more to prove than the UK Index Fund.



On the right track: Tracker funds have lower dealing and management costs than actively managed funds

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Halifax Building Society is offering a tax-free PEP linked to an interest-only mortgage. The initial charge is a high 7.5 per cent, the annual charge just 0.5 per cent.

Barclays Bank is launching new fixed-rate savings bonds earning 5.75 per cent gross for a year and 6.25 per cent for three years on a minimum £2,000.



Birmingham Midshires is offering a new equity-linked Tessa to investors with the full £9,000 to roll over. It guarantees a 20 per cent return over five years, even if the index of 100 top shares falls, and the full benefit of any rise in the index over the full five years. Alternatively, half the Tessa can be equity-linked and the balance earns a guaranteed 35 per cent.

United Patients, an insurance scheme underwritten at

Lloyd's, is offering all *Independent* readers group membership of a policy which pays them £1,600 a month while in hospital and £600 a month convalescing at home for indefinite periods. The joining fee is £25 and group weekly premiums are £3.85 between age 18 and 30, £4.20 aged 31-44 and £4.55 up to a maximum age of 60. A cheaper silver and a dearer platinum scheme are also available.

Commercial Union is offering a 1 per cent discount for lump-sum investments in its Monthly Income Plus Corporate Bond PEP between now and 16 March plus a 1 per cent discount on any CU PEP or unit trust investment during 1996-97.

Swiss Life has cut premium rates on all five-year renewable term assurance contracts. A male non-

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SCOTTISH WIDOWS

The early investor catches the best Tessa

As investors ponder where to put large lump sums, some new offers have already sold out. Clifford German finds out what three holders plan to do with the proceeds

Some of the best new fixed-rate Tessas have been withdrawn. TSB sold out its initial offer of 7.64 per cent fixed for five years to investors who invested the full £9,000 worth of maturing Tessa within 48 hours, although anyone with a Tessa maturing in the next three months who has reserved the new rate will be accepted. Everyone else is being offered 7.22 per cent. Britannia Building Society sold out its offer of 7.65 per cent and replaced it with a 7.25 per cent rate, while National Counties has cut its rate for reinvesting a full Tessa to 7.2 per cent.

If other top offers, such as Northern Rock, sell out quickly many investors who decided to take advantage of the permitted six-month delay before reinvesting and those whose Tessas do not mature until the summer may have missed the boat as far as the best fixed-rate offers are concerned.

Most attract heavy penalties if investors want to switch to a new provider. Variable-rate offers are still available, however, with Northern Rock offering 8 per cent to start with and Cheltenham & Gloucester 7.75 per cent. But these rates could go lower if base rates fall as expected.

Henry Toulouse, a retired auditor from Monmouth, and his wife, Diana, both have Tessas with the Yorkshire Building Society that mature in February and April. Both considered rolling their £9,000 capital into a new Tessa but decided against it on the grounds that interest rates no longer look as attractive as they did five years ago, and at their age they did not necessarily want to obtain the tax benefits.

After consulting their financial adviser, Gerald Davies of Kynan Financial Services, they have decided each to invest in a corporate bond PEP with Commercial Union.

They recognise that there is a moderate element of risk if interest rates rise

and not too much chance of capital gains. But it gives them a current yield of 7.54 per cent net of tax. They intend to let the interest roll up but they know they can take interest or capital at any time without forfeiting the tax-free benefits.

They will invest the maximum permitted £6,000 each in the bond PEP and the balance of the maturing Tessa plus the interest will initially go into a three-month notice account with the building society, and into a Schroder Pacific Growth unit trust. Eventually, the money in the building society might well find its way into a PEP.

David Ashman, 45, a local government worker, has decided to use the accumulated interest on his maturing £9,000 Tessa with Britannia Building Society to buy a personal computer for his son, Daniel, nine, who will be able to play games as well as learn new skills on it, while Dad will use it to do the family accounts. David also made up his mind

early on to roll over the capital on his maturing Tessa into a new issue, but it turned out not to be quite as straightforward as he expected.

Britannia wrote to him three weeks before Christmas telling him his options, but he decided to look around at the opposition before deciding where to reinvest. By the time he had come to a decision Britannia's own fixed-rate offer of 7.65 per cent was sold out. He looked at the TSB and its limited issue of 7.64 per cent fixed was also exhausted, so he has decided to leap aboard the bandwagon at Northern Rock and take its fixed-rate offer of 7.64 per cent. He knows he could have waited longer to see if a better offer appears but the prospect of keeping his cash in an ordinary account paying maybe 4 per cent net of tax for up to six months did not appeal to him.

He is well aware that Northern Rock imposes the most stringent penalties – 180 days' loss of interest plus a fee of £30 if he changes his mind and wants to

move the money within the next five years – but he is confident he will not be tempted. The Tessa is not his only investment asset, so he can afford to be locked in for the duration.

Michele Chalk of Hillingdon plans to roll over her £9,000 Tessa with Nationwide Building Society as soon as it matures next month. She has been a loyal investor with the society for 30 years and does not even plan to look at competitive offers from rival societies. The maturing interest is also going to be reinvested in a Bonus 60 account with Nationwide, paying 4 per cent.

No, she did not even consider reinvesting it in anything more adventurous and risky like a PEP. Her husband, John, is an insurance broker, and he has those kinds of things, she says dismissively. They keep their finances separately and she prefers the certainty of a building society and the ease of access to the money. What is he doing with his maturing Tessa money? He isn't saying.

"Ordinary PEPs and TESSAs used to be all the rage."



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*Source: Merton, offer to bid, gross income reinvested in 1.1.96. If you call Fidelity and you receive advice this will only relate to the products offered by Fidelity Investment Services Ltd or a member of its marketing group. Past performance is no guarantee of future returns. The value of units and income from them may go down as well as up and an investor may not get back the amount invested. Tax assumptions may be subject to future statutory changes and the value of tax savings and eligibility to invest in a PEP will depend on individual circumstances. The MoneyBuilder Range consists of the MoneyBuilder Cash and Income Funds, Fidelity Cash Trust and Fidelity MoneyBuilder. All funds are regulated by IMRC and the Personal Investment Authority. All yields are estimated and not guaranteed. All of which are managed by Fidelity Investment Services Limited. All companies within the Fidelity marketing group are regulated by IMRC and the Personal Investment Authority. All yields are estimated and not guaranteed.

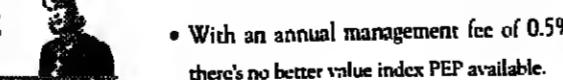
**Estimated gross income calculated on 2.1.96. Redemption yield is 7.1%. Gross estimated Compound Annual Rate (CAR) as at 2.1.96 assuming income reinvested. Not CAR 4.5% issued by Fidelity Investments Limited.

MONEYBUILDER CASH



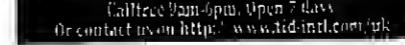
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money

Best borrowing rates

	Telephone	% Rate and period	Max adv %	Fee	Incentive	Redemption penalty
MORTGAGES						
Fixed rates						
Hinckley & Rugby	0800 774499	0.50 to 1/1/97	70	£250	3 yrs unemployment ins	1st 5 yrs: indiv determined
Yorkshire BS	0800 378836	6.25 for 3 years	85	£250	—	1st 5 yrs: 6% of sum repaid
Mortgage Trust Variable rates						
Northern Rock BS	0800 550551	7.49 to 1/1/01	95	—	£500 cash rebate	1st 5 yrs: 6/3 mths interest
Greenwich BS	0181 858 8212	1.19 to 1/3/97	90	—	Refund valuation fee	1st 5 yrs: 6 mths interest
National Counties	01372 742211	4.99 for 3 years	95	—	—	1st 5 yrs: discount reclaimed
First time buyers fixed rates						
B of Ireland Mfgs	01734 510100	9.99 to 1/1/97	95	£280	—	1st 5 yrs: 6 mths interest
Market Harborough BS	01858 463244	4.49 to 1/1/98	95	£100	Free unemployment ins to 30/9/96	1st 5 yrs: 6 mths interest
Midland Bank	0800 494999	7.49 to 30/3/01	95	£250	Refund val fee & 6 mths free ASU	To 30/3/01: 6/3 mths int
First time buyers variable rates						
Scarborough BS	0800 590547	1.09 for 1 year	95	—	£150 cashback	1st 5 yrs: rebate rec'd & 6.1% of sum repaid
Greenwich BS	0181 858 8212	3.99 for 2 years	95	—	—	1st 5 yrs: discount reclaimed
Northern Rock BS	0800 591500	4.94 to 1/3/99	95	—	Refund valuation fee	1st 5 yrs: 5% of sum repaid
PERSONAL LOANS						
Unsecured	Telephone	APR				
Direct Line	0141 248 9966	14.90%			Fixed monthly payments (£3,000 over 3 years)	
Midland Bank	0800 180180	15.40			With insurance £114.41	Without insurance £102.59
Abbey National	0345 545556	15.50			£116.54	£103.14
Secured (second charge)			Max LTV	Advance	£115.18	£103.26
Clydesdale Bank	0800 240024	8.60	Net	Term	£3K - £15K	6 mths to 25 years
First Direct	0800 242424	9.70	80%	Up to 40 years	£3K to £9K	£2.5K - £100K
Royal B of Scotland	Via branch	9.30	70%	3 years - retirement	—	—
OVERDRAFTS						
Telephone	Account		Authorised	Unauthorised		
Woolwich BS	0800 400900	Current	0.76	9.5	2.18	29.5
Alliance & Leicester BS	0500 959595	Alliance	0.76	9.5	2.20	29.8
Abbey National	0500 200500	Current	0.79	9.9	2.18	29.5
CREDIT CARDS						
Telephone	Card	Min income	Rate %	APR	Annual fee	
Standard						
Robert Fleming/S&P	0800 829024	MasterCard/Visa	—	0.98%	12.10	— 0
Robert Fleming/S&P	0800 829024	MasterCard/Visa	—	1.00	14.60	£12
Royal Bank of Scotland	0800 161616	MasterCard	—	1.14	14.50	— 0
Gold Cards						
Co-operative Bank	0345 212212	Visa	£20,000	0.5417M	11.42	£120
Royal B of Scotland	01702 362890	Visa	£20,000	1.05	14.50	£55H
NatWest Bank	0800 200400	Visa	£20,000	1.14	15.90	£35
STORE CARDS						
Telephone	Payment by direct debit		Payment by other methods			
John Lewis	Via store	% pm	APR	% pm	APR	
Marks and Spencer	01244 681681	1.90A	25.30	2.00A	26.80	
Sears	Via store	1.94	25.90	2.20	29.8	
<small>APR Annualised percentage rate. LTV Loan to value C Clients of Coutts & Co only. E Available to comprehensive motor insurance policyholders aged over 22 years. H Annual fee waived after first year if £2K+ charged to card during previous year. M MONEYFACTS 01692 500577</small>						
<small>ATI Accident, sickness and unemployment O No interest fee applied. Q Annual rate 2% above R Fleming base rate. M Equivalent to basic rate. 11 January 1996</small>						

Best savings rates

	Telephone number	Account	Notice or term	Deposit	Rate %	Interest interval
INSTANT ACCESS						
Portman BS	01202 392444	Instant Access	Instant	£100	4.80	Year
Teachers BS	0800 378669	Button Share	Instant	£5,000	5.70	6 Months
Co-operative Bank	0345 252000	Pattifinder	Instant	£5,000	6.20	Month
Skipton BS	01756 705111	High Street	Instant	£30,000	6.50	Year
INSTANT ACCESS POSTAL ACCOUNTS						
Capital Trust	01538 392808	Postal	—	£2,000	5.60	Year
Bristol & West BS	0800 303330	Direct Access	Postal	£5,000	5.75	Year
Bristol & West BS	0800 303330	Direct Access	Postal	£10,000	5.80	Year
Manchester BS	0181 839 5545	Money by Mail	Postal	£25,000	6.25	Year
NOTICE ACCOUNTS & BONDS						
Nottingham BS	0115 948 1444	Pushmark	7 day P	£2,500	5.75	Year
Manchester BS	0161 834 5465	45 Day	45 day	£5,000	6.25	Year
Bradford & Bingley BS	0345 248248	Direct 60	60 day P	£15,000	6.50	Year
Chelsea BS	0800 272505	120 day	£1,000	6.50	Year	
MONTHLY INTEREST						
Co-operative Bank	0345 252000	Pattifinder	Instant	£5,000	5.62	Month
Manchester BS	0161 834 5465	45 Day	45 day	£5,000	6.08	Month
Leopold Joseph & Son	0171 588 2323	40 Day Notice	40 day	£10,000	6.52	Month
Bradford & Bingley BS	0345 248248	Direct 60	60 day p	£15,000	6.30	Month
FIXED RATE BONDS						
West Bromwich BS	0990 143668	Guaranteed Growth	31/1/97	£5,000	6.80F	Maturity
Sum Banking Corp	0148 744505	Investment Cards	2 yr bond	£1,000	6.80F	Year
Bradford & Bingley BS	01274 553332	Fixed Rate Bond	1/4/99	£2,500	6.90F	Year
Sum Banking Corp	0148 744505	Investment Cards	5 yr bond	£1,000	7.25F	Year
CHEQUE ACCOUNTS						
Chelsea BS	0800 717575	Classic Postal	Instant	£2,500	4.50	Year
Newmarch Benson	01202 502404	HICA	Instant	£2,500	5.75	Month
Alliance & Leicester BS	0116 271 7272	Alliance	Instant	£5,000	5.00	Month
Northern Rock BS	0500 505000	Current A/C Gold	Instant	£10,000	5.27	Month
GUARANTEED INCOME BONDS						
AIG Life	0181 680 7172	1 year	£5,000	4.80FN	Year	
AIG Life	0181 680 7172	2 year	£5,000	5.15FN	Year	
Financial Assurance	0181 390 3398	3 year	£5,000	5.20FN	Year	
Premium Life	0144 458721	4 year	£1,000	5.40FN	Year	
Pinnacle Insurance	0181 207 9007	5 year	£3,000	6.45FN	Year	
OFFSHORE						
Newcastle Bank, Gibr	00350 76168	Nova Access	Instant	£5,000	6.10	Year
Skipton (Guernsey) Ltd	01481 727374	Guernsey 60	60 day	£25,000	6.75	Year
Portman Cl Ltd	01481 822747	Gold Plus	90 day	£5,000	6.45	Year
B'ham Midshires, Guern	01481 700680	Fixed Account	31/1/99	£5,000	7.25F	Year
NATIONAL SAVINGS						
Investment Account	1 month	£20	£20	5.25	Year	
Income Bond			£25,000	6.00	Year	
Capital Bond			£25,000	6.75	Month	
First Option Bond	Series 1	5 year	£100	7.75 F	Year	
Pensioner's Good Income Bond	Series 2	12 month	£1,000	6.40 F	Year	
NS Certificates (tax-free)		20 year	£20,000	6.80 F	Year	
42nd issue		5 year	£100	5.85 F	Maturity	
8th Index linked		5 year	£100	3.00 - RPI	Maturity	
Children's Bond	Issue G	5 year	£25	7.85 F	Maturity	
<small>P post only F fixed rate</small>						

going out



CINEMA

Il Postino (above) Michael Radford's tale of poetry and love in 1950s Italy earned the biggest-ever release of any subtitled film, and deservedly so. Living in Oblivion Affectionate yet scathing insight into independent film-making. Director-writer-the-film Steve Buscemi seems forever on the verge of epilepsy, but the excellent James Le Gros is memorable as a preening prima donna.

Seven Just as the serial-killer genre seemed to be growing blunt, in sweeps David Fincher to sharpen it up. Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt are the cops pursuing a Seven Deadly Sins-inspired killer. A film which leaves a lasting imprint.

Ryan Gilbey

THEATRE

The Glass Menagerie (above) Knock-out performances by Zoe Wanamaker and Claire Skinner in Tennessee Williams's magnificent heartbreaker. Comedy Theatre, London WC2. The Jungle Book (left) Stephen directs a gripping production full of visual flair and bold humour which banishes Disney cuteness and tears. An audience entrainer: Young Vic, London SE1. **Rupert Street** (below) Hearts, Club, Jitters, Harvey's latest Sophie Chamberlain is wickedly observed and strong on laughs. White Elizabeth Bennet is hysterically funny and heartbreakingly truthful. Criterion Theatre, London WC2. **Allegro** (right) The story of the ill-fated 1960s. New West End, 2nd floor, 1200, 245, 530, 8, 11, 15 (5*)

EXHIBITIONS

William Nicholson (above) A compelling show of seductive paintings. Fashion dated, Nicholson's position as one of the finest painters of the 20th century. Ketts' Yard, Cambridge. **Emil Nolde** This unmissable exhibition charts his career from early Biblical works through the sublime Seascapes to work produced while hiding from the Nazis. Whitechapel, London E1. **Art & Power** Last chance to catch this well-presented show focusing on the impact of the cultural ambivalence of the three key totalitarian nations of the 1930s. Featuring art from Germany, Italy and Russia. Hayward Gallery, London SE1. **Il Postino** (above) Michael Radford's tale of poetry and love in 1950s Italy earned the biggest-ever release of any subtitled film, and deservedly so. Living in Oblivion Affectionate yet scathing insight into independent film-making. Director-writer-the-film Steve Buscemi seems forever on the verge of epilepsy, but the excellent James Le Gros is memorable as a preening prima donna.

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David Bannister



POP

Chef (left) **Reckless** (above) The Wu-Tang Clan's Reckless opera is a hit on disc but still awaits a live debut British date. Reckless's cuisine Only Built For Cuban Liquor is a formidable album last year. **Sophomore**, London W1, 18 Jan.

Unleashed (Baby Bird Boozes, melancholy and thoughtfully maverick) tunes are the business of these well-paired bands, part of the NME Brats. **Torv**, Astoria, London W1, 19 Jan.

Marc Almond Benefit for Ninety Hospices. Marc Almond and David McAlmont bring the glam, while Olafur and Yorokob supply classic pop rock. **Brixton Palace**, London SW9, 19 Jan.

CLASSICAL

Die tote Stadt, Erich Korngold's lascivious Twenties opera, is a hit on disc but still awaits a live debut British date. **Reckless's** cuisine Only Built For Cuban Liquor is a formidable album last year. **Sophomore**, London W1, 18 Jan.

Sergei Leiferkus (above) sings Rachmaninov - a powerful Russian combination of fine bartoné and emotional song, with Graham Johnson as pianist. **Wigmore Hall**, London W1, today.

Those who favour a tragic ending will prefer **Die tote Stadt**, Erich Korngold's Twenties opera, is a hit on disc but still awaits a live debut British date. **Reckless's** cuisine Only Built For Cuban Liquor is a formidable album last year. **Sophomore**, London W1, 18 Jan.

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City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra meets up with guest conductor Mark Elder in a programme of Tippett's Triple Concerto, and Holst's Planets. **Birmingham Symphony Hall**, tonight.

DANCE

The slightly disappointing Coronation Services (above) continue at Sadler's Wells with the new **Noche de Santiago** and a vibrant **La Mas Honda**. **Sadler's Wells**, London EC1.

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staying in

THE WEEK AHEAD					
	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Television by Gerard Gilbert	Our Friends in the North 9pm BBC2 (above). Ambitious, so-far-so-fine, nine-part drama from Peter Flannery, tracing four friends from Newcastle from 1964 till today (1896080). Cutting Edge: Sexual Harassment 9pm C4. It is estimated that one in three women are sexually harassed at work. Cathy Elliott's film follows four of them as they pursue their cases through industrial tribunals (2370). Omnibus 10.40pm BBC1. Special extended-length film charting the history of Gospel music in the United States (685092).	The Decision 9pm C4. Medical dilemmas brought into focus in a new series. In the first case, a woman in her 19th week of pregnancy discovers she has cervical cancer. Can she afford to wait five weeks for a caesarean? (1898448). The House 9.30 BBC2 (above). A year in the life of the Royal Opera House. Fly-on-the-diva TV in six parts (82239). The Gulf War 10.45pm BBC1. The series, like the war, draws to an inconclusive end (640852).	Coronation Street 7.30pm ITV. Brian and Denise — she thinks it's all over; he has other ideas (8333).	The Real X-Files 9pm C4. Another chance to see this film from last year's sci-fi weekend — and about the CIA's experiments in the paranormal (4031).	Film: Internal Affairs (Mike Figgis 1990 US) 10.45pm BBC1 (above). Richard Gere plays an nasty as the bent cop to Andy Garcia's investigating police officer (18384762). Fantasy Football League 11.15pm BBC2. How will Des' "unflappable" Lynam play it with the Lads as he lands guest-manager spot? (315906).
Radio by Robert Hanks	After Hours: The Scott Inquiry 12.05am R5. Every night this week, the late-night current affairs show looks at the aftermath of the Arms-to-Iraq business and wonders what the inquiry's final report has in store, for Government ministers.	Space Fictions 2pm R4. Four programmes on how outer-space has been tackled in fiction, with contributors including Brian Aldiss and Doris Lessing. As one speaker puts it: "The profound tragedy of science-fiction is Sputnik."	Times Past, Times Future 7.45pm R4. Three former Home Secretaries — Merlyn Rees, Roy Jenkins and Kenneth Baker — discuss the powers and limitations of the office, with former Chief Constable John Alderson describing what it's like at the other end of the chain.	First Men in the Moon 10am R4FM. James Bolam unwisely tries to out-ham Donald Sinden (spluttering vigorously as the eccentric Professor Cavor, inventor of the anti-gravity metal favorite) in a four-part adaptation of H G Wells's jolly tale of lunar exploration.	Charles Ives Weekend 7.30pm R3. Three days of concerts and features devoted to one of the great original thinkers — and great entertainers — of modern music, beginning with a BBC Symphony Orchestra concert live from the Barbican.

Sunday Television and Radio

BBC1

6.45 **BB1** **Coward of the County** (Dick Lowry 1981 UK). The brother (Kerry Rogers) of a Southern preacher is dubbed a coward for refusing to join the army (703462).

8.15 **Stenos** — **World Spanish** (4523066). 8.30 **Breakfast with Frost**. Tony Blair (47172).

9.30 **See Heart** (S) (3432714).

9.45 **The French Experience** (5) (3437269).

10.00 **United Nations Anniversary Service**. From the Central Hall Methodist Church, a service to commemorate the first ever meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 50 years ago this month (568004).

11.00 **The 11th Hour** (S) (28288).

12.00 **Countryfile** (5) (89714).

12.30 **News on the Record**. The proposal to bring British Summer Time in line with European standards (91240).

1.30 **EastEnders**, **Omnibus** (5) (5538172).

2.55 **Ice Station Zebra** (John Sturges 1968 US). Cold War thriller based on the Alastair Maclean novel finds a Russian satellite coming down near the North Pole, stars a distractingly Rock Hudson and a proficient Patrick McGowan, then at the height of his Prisoner fame (31057627).

5.15 **Black Hearts in Battersea** (S) (654337). *

5.45 **News: Weather** (245608). *

6.05 **Local News** (689820).

6.10 **Songs of Praise**. From Richmond-upon-Thames (S) (285820).

6.45 **Antiques Roadshow**. From Liangollen, in mid-Wales. I often find myself wondering how many of these antiques are — however unwittingly — stolen, especially when people claim they "picked it up" for a fiver at a car-boot sale! (5) (552420).

7.30 **Pie in the Sky** (5) (649424). *

8.20 **As Time Goes By**. Lionel receives a letter from his ex-wife. Literate but snoozy sitcom with Judi Dench and Geoffrey Palmer (S) (835627). *

8.50 **News, Weather** (808733). *

9.05 **The Gulf War**. See **Preview**, p28 (147207). *

10.05 **Filipina Dreamgirls**. Andrew Davies's Screen One film from 1991 about five men from Wales who book an eight-day package to the Philippines hoping to return with a mail-order bride. Nice to see Charlie Drake out and about again, joined by Bill Maynard and David Thewlis (R) (2343624). *

11.25 **Escape from the Planet of the Apes** (Don Taylor 1971 US). The best of the sequels, which is saying very little, finds some of the apes going back in time to contemporary LA (803998).

1.20 **Weather** (1583973). To 1.25am.

REGIONS: N: 2.55pm Now You're Talking. 3.20 Rathlin Island 3.50 Big Al. 4.05 Columbo. 6.05 Inside Ulster News.

BBC2

7.30 **Children's BBC**. Rupert. 7.35 **The Adventures of Skippy**. 8.00 **Playdays**. 8.20 **Grimmy**. 8.40 **Jackanory**: *Finger*. 8.55 **Bitza**. 9.10 **Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles**. 9.35 **Phantom 2040**. 9.55 **Highly Sprung**. 10.25 **Grange Hill**. 10.50 **Agent Z** and the Penguin from Mars. 11.15 **As Seen on TV**. 11.45 **Star Trek** (6579356).

12.30 **Fantasy Football League** (S) (15627).

1.00 **Singled Out**. US dating game in which contestants pick out a date from the studio audience (20646).

1.30 **Regional programmes** (14998).

2.00 **Finian's Rainbow** (Francis Ford Coppola 1968 US). Coppola in his big-budget debut, and Fred Astaire in his last starring role, made this unfairly slated musical about an Irish immigrant, whose leprechaun (a very bouncy Tommy Steele) comes to life in the American Deep South (84103646).

4.15 **Skid Sunday**. The men's downhill from Kitzbuhel, Austria (5955406).

4.55 **Rugby Special: Highlights of Wasps vs West Hartlepool** (S) (1328207).

5.55 **Natural World**. New series begins with a sequel to the popular 1993 documentary about Echo the elephant and his calf, Ebi, who live in Kenya's Amboseli National Park (S) (840511).

6.45 **The Big Trip**. Travel series aimed at the yow market (Lisa Anson as narrator gives the game away) in which three pairs of friends go backpacking. See **Preview**, p28 (950882). *

7.30 **The Persuader**. **The TV Times of Lord Lew Grade**. The TV mogul's career assessed with the help of Roger Moore, Patrick McCadden and Miss Piggy. From last year's **ATV Night** (547066).

8.20 **In Search of Power**. Kirsty Wark introduces a three-part investigation into who really wields the power in present-day Britain (480443).

9.00 **The Tourist** (S) (227917).

9.50 **Another Foot in the Past**. Actress Liz Dawn (**Coronation Street**'s Vera Duckworth) revisits a childhood haunt (R) (S) (243627).

10.00 **Timewatch**. The hidden history of the great temple of Karnak. See **Preview** (S) (179627). *

10.50 **From Hollywood to Deadwood** (Re Pickett 1991 US). A Hollywood actress disappears mid-shoot and two private eyes are hired to find her in this enjoyable indie road movie (78480511).

12.25 **Plain Prairie Tales** (Wayne Cox 1990 US). Four camp-fire horror stories, as told to city slicker Brad Dourif by bounty-hunter James Earl Jones (7513931). To 1.50am.

3.35 **Aloha**, **Bobbie and Rose** (Floyd Mutrux 1975 US). Teens on a crime spree in the wake of the success of *Bonnie and Clyde* (2853554).

5.00 **ITV Sport Classics** (77115). To 5.30am.

ITV/London

6.00 **GMTV**. 6.00 **The Sunday Review**. 6.30 **News and Sport**. 7.00 **The Sunday Programme** (70998). 8.00 **Disney Club**. Eliza Szonert (Danni in **Neighbours**) and Jagger Bay are in the studio (S) (352212). *

10.15 **Link**. How disability products are marketed (S) (7448733). *

10.30 **Sunday Matters**. Dora Bryan talks about her faith, and we get bush 11.00 **Morning Worship** at St Peter & St Paul, in Wadhurst, Sussex (S) (32511).

12.30 **Crosscall** (21563).

1.00 **News**, **Weather** (28172356). *

1.10 **Stuntmasters** (8193269).

2.00 **Yesterday's Heroes**. Frank Worthington and Charlie George (5375).

2.30 **The Sunday Match**. Birmingham City vs Charlton Athletic. Brian Moore supplies the commentary to this part of the End-of-Season clash (65902820).

5.15 **Cartoon Time** (4425882).

5.30 **London Tonight** (245849). *

5.50 **News, Weather** (4217331).

6.00 **Father of the Bride** (Charles Shyer 1991 US). Uninspired remake of the 1950 comedy about a father's misgivings about his daughter's wedding has Steve Martin in the *Spencer Tracy* role, and Diane Keaton as his sensible, stoical wife. From the writer/director team who gave us *Baby Boom*, if you want an idea of the tone (S) (64214).

8.00 **A Touch of Frost**. A soldier is shot at an army camp (S) (8207). *

10.00 **Lights, Camera, Action: A Centenary of the Cinema**. Serious cineastes won't be taking their movie history from Michael Aspel, especially as there have already been two excellent series on the same subject (S) (77141). *

11.00 **News, Weather** (23557).

11.15 **Splitting Image**. The 18th and last series of the ageing latex satire introduces puppets of Camilla Parker-Bowles, Paula Yates and Antoinette Turner (S) (932627).

11.45 **Compass**. African game warden Stephen Perse takes a 1,500-mile walk along the spine of Japan (R) (920998).

12.50 **Zandy's Bride** (Jan Troell 1974 US). Gene Hackman and Liv Ullmann play a grumpy western farmer and his mail-order bride in this unattractive romance (838270).

2.35 **Cue the Music**. Cue Fleetwood Mac in concert (7525370).

3.35 **Aloha**, **Bobbie and Rose** (Floyd Mutrux 1975 US). Teens on a crime spree in the wake of the success of *Bonnie and Clyde* (2853554).

5.00 **ITV Sport Classics** (77115). To 5.30am.

Channel 4

6.20 **Blitz** (R) (8734337).

7.15 **Take 5. With the Magic Roundabout, Bush Tails, Natalie, Ivor the Engine and Jiggy Bear** (29171).

7.45 **The Magic School Bus** (S) (79612).

8.15 **Hong Kong Phooey** (4549004).

8.30 **Stunt Dawgs** (9789356).

8.55 **Biker Mice from Mars** (R) (9791191).

9.20 **The Secret World of Alex Mack** (5) (4383337).

9.50 **Earthworm Jim** (S) (1848240).

10.15 **Saved by the Bell: The New Class** (1678269). *

10.40 **Rocko's Modern Life** (7909998).

11.05 **Dennis** (597795).

11.15 **Rewhole** (831589).

12.15 **Missile Impossible** (98269). *

1.15 **Football Match: Internazionale vs Roma**, featuring Paul Ince (63411801).

3.30 **When Magoo Flew** (2030559).

3.40 **BB1** **Kids the Kid** (David Miller 1941 US).

Robert Taylor, dressed entirely in black, stands out against the Technicolor backdrop of this, well, slightly colourless version of America's most famous outlaw legend (5) (6085).

5.30 **Hollywoods**. From last Monday (R) (S) (608). *

6.00 **The Persuaders**. Danny likes it with beauties and commies while playing roulette down in Brighton. Why those crazy Cold War years (18714). *

7.00 **Time Team**. A prehistoric river valley bed in Oxfordshire is about to be turned into a rubbish tip. Tony Robinson and archaeologically-minded chums see what they can salvage (S) (6085). *

8.00 **Bill Hooper** (Hal Needham 1978 US). 1.20pm. But Reynolds. You can almost smell the clothes-sense and attitude. Actually, at this time, Burt's attitude was swiftly changing, as he increasingly sent up his machismo screen personality. Here he plays a stuntman beginning to feel his age, in an easy-going movie sympathetic to its subject. Director Needham was a former stuntman, and Reynolds himself was famous for doing his own stunts (83267578). *

9.55 **Myra Hindley — A Life Sentence**. Updated documentary, originally shown in the *Witness* strand and given a dose of semi-topically by Hindley's semi-recent letter to the *Guardian*, retracing the history of the Moors murder case and considering the arguments for and against releasing Hindley (383172).

10.55 **American Football: The Road to Super Bowl**. Get into shape (well, the sort of shape you get from drinking six-packs on the sofa) for 28 January's Super Bowl XXX with tonight's all-night screening of the two games that decide who will meet in the final — full recorded coverage of Dallas Cowboys vs Green Bay Packers, and Pittsburgh Steelers vs Indianapolis Colts (7903456). To 6.00am.

ITV/Regions

Wales As London except: 12.25pm **Five** (Newcastle (324551)). 1.10 **Highway to Heaven** (175906). 2.05 **Countrywide** (4949337). 2.35 **Kick Off** (169290). 3.15 **Day** (4949338). 4.00 **Five** (Newcastle (324551)). 5.45 **Five** (Cardiff (324552)). 6.20 **Five** (Plymouth (324553)). 7.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324554)). 8.30 **Five** (Plymouth (324555)). 9.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324556)). 10.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324557)). 11.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324558)). 12.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324559)). 1.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324560)). 2.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324561)). 3.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324562)). 4.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324563)).

North As London except: 12.25pm **Five** (Newcastle (324551)). 1.10 **Wales** **Watch Agenda** (324551). 1.10 **Web You Were Here ...** (2329567). 1.40 **West Country** (324552). 2.05 **Five** (Cardiff (324553)). 2.35 **Five** (Cardiff (324554)). 3.05 **Five** (Cardiff (324555)). 3.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324556)). 4.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324557)). 4.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324558)).

Scotland As London except: 12.25pm **Central Newsweek** (6520275). 1.10 **Flight to Heaven** (175906). 1.10 **Five** (Cardiff (324551)). 2.05 **Five** (Cardiff (324552)). 3.05 **Five** (Cardiff (324553)). 4.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324554)). 5.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324555)). 6.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324556)). 7.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324557)). 8.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324558)). 9.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324559)). 10.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324560)). 11.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324561)). 12.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324562)). 1.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324563)). 2.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324564)). 3.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324565)). 4.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324566)).

NI As London except: 12.25pm **Seven Days** (6566891). 1.10 **What's the Difference?** (2329567). 1.40 **West View** (6533104). 2.00 **What's the Difference?** (6533105). 2.30 **The Moon** (6533106). 3.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324551)). 3.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324552)). 4.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324553)). 4.30 **Five** (Cardiff (324554)).

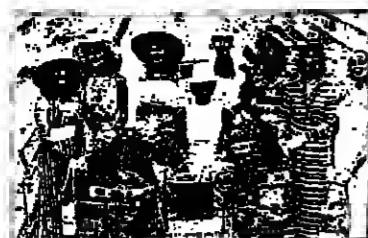
NI **As London except: 12.25pm **Weekday Update** (6520275). 1.10 **Highway to Heaven** (175906). 1.10 **Five** (Cardiff (324551)). 2.05 **Five** (Cardiff (324552)). 3.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324553)). 4.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324554)). 5.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324555)). 6.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324556)). 7.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324557)). 8.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324558)). 9.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324559)). 10.00 **Five** (Cardiff (324560)).**

Perplexity

Political arithmetic: If J times **MAJOR** equals **TORIES**, and each distinct letter represents a different digit, and no word may begin with a zero, what is the value of **5MARTIES**?

A Larousse Desk Reference Encyclopedia will be awarded to the first correct entry opened on 25 January. Entries to: Saturday Pastimes, the *Independent*, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL.

Christmas Perplexities answers: Hillary Clinton (I can't think), Eric Cantona (seen on air), Tony Blair (not him), Michael Aberton (him), the Queen (she's not her), Virginia Hey (she's not her), Bruno Kirby (not him), OJ Simpson (johns mops), Boris Yeltsin (sober sir in), Raiko Madic (marital dock), Monica Seles (loses a match), Camilla Parker Bowles (not power's black maid), and Nick Lesion (so clicky, Vladimir Zhirkov's not risk lazy him) Winner: Philip Marlow.



The big picture

The Stepford Wives
Sat 10.35pm C4

Screenwriter William Goldman was on a roll in the mid-1970s. *All the President's Men* and *Marathon Man* were preceded by *The Stepford Wives*, his clever adaptation of Ira Levin's novel. The screenplay is a modern-day parable about suburban conformity. In Bryan Forbes' film, Katherine Ross plays an independent-minded wife who moves to the sleepy New England village of Stepford, where she is deeply disturbed by the submissiveness of the women-folk. There's something fishy going on at the local Men's Association...

Television preview

RECOMMENDED VIEWING THIS WEEKEND
by Gerard Gilbert

Maybe we are, after all – as Peter York claimed last week – in denial of our Eighties selves. To judge by the almost pathologically hostile reaction to its perfectly enjoyable and valid Peter York's *Eighties* (Sat BBC2) you'd think that the "style guru" was personally responsible for that giddy decade.

Indeed, critics seem to have had a collective fit of political correctness – seeming not to sense that York is sending up both himself and the decade. Didn't they read the label? This is *Peter York's Eighties* – not Will Hutton's Eighties, or, heaven forbid, Derek Hatton's Eighties. So, on with the show. "I love yuppies – they're such energetic little creatures," says the mischievous style guru, as this week he considers the property boom.

Of course, there was another side to the 1980s – and the legacy of that other side is the jumping off point for *The Bare Necessities* (Sat ITV), a pilot episode for a comedy-drama about five newly unemployed Yorkshire miners who form a troupe of male strippers. You can sense writer Ken Blascoe straining for *Auf Wiedersehen Pet* (on C4, coincidentally,

at the same time), and, in common with most post-Thatcherite reports from our de-industrialised heartlands, the undertones are dark, but jaunty and defiant. They can't hide a bleak desperation, though, the national tragedy that was the flipside of the 1980s. Arthur Scargill's Eighties, you might say.

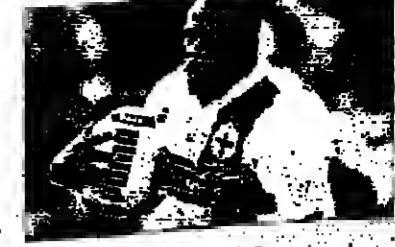
If some of us still feel guilty about our Eighties selves, then there are no such reservations about *The Gulf War* (Sun BBC1). After all, oest to no-one died, did they, in the virtual reality of that conflict? Well, yes, of course they did – but they were mainly conscripted Iraqi soldiers. You really feel for them, caught between the world's best equipped superpower and the world's most lethally self-protective leader. No wonder he considers the property boom.

In tomorrow's episode, the land war to liberate Kuwait begins and, instead of finding themselves in another Vietnam – or even Saddam's Mother of All Battles – the American military found themselves at a turkey shoot. The Iraqis became "lucrative targets". An interesting footnote: if Saddam had authorised the use of chemical weapons, the allies would have

breached the dams on the Euphrates and literally drowned Baghdad.

A new series called *Divine Magic* (Sat C4) starts with an eye-opening film about voodoo, which, if you were to believe Hollywood, is all about drinking fresh cockerel blood and raising the undead. In fact, it is a belief system devoutly held by more than 40 million people worldwide. Its bad public image started long before Hollywood was even an orange grove – stemming from the fact that voodoo became the symbol of resistance during the 18th-century slave revolts in that hell hole that was colonial Haiti.

Timewatch (Sun BBC2) tells us how ancient Egyptian gods used to masturbate, fellate themselves and, each night, sleep with their mothers. If you don't believe me, look at the pictures on the walls of the ruined city of Karnak. High priestesses were called "God's Hand", for obvious reasons, and it was their duty to get the deities in the right mood to raise the sun of a morning and make sure the Nile had its annual flood. It's fun watching a bunch of dry academics explaining all this.



The big match

Wigan vs St Helens
Sat 2.45pm BBC1

Wigan have triumphed in six of the last 10 Regal Trophy Finals. They must once again be favourites in the match against St Helens at the dazzling Alfred McAlpine Stadium in Huddersfield this afternoon, the last final before the onset of the summer Super League. Wigan have more firepower than the US Marines; the speedy Martin Offiah (above) likes nothing better than living up to his nickname of "Chariots" or "Great Balls"; while Gary Connolly has been in sparkling form running in tries from everywhere.

Saturday Television and Radio

BBC1

- 7.25 News; Weather (4827936).
- 7.30 Children's BBC. Super Ted. 7.35 The Artbox Bunch. 7.50 (zmqoud. 8.05 Willy Fog 2.
- 8.30 The New Adventures of Superman (R) (S) (6280159). *
- 9.15 Live and Kicking. Cher is this week's main attraction. *Trev and Simon* rather less so (S) (63874690).
- 12.12 Weather (6447077).
- 12.15 Grandstand. 12.20 Football Focus. 12.55 Racing from Ascot; 1.00 the Victor Chandler Novices Hurdle. 1.10 News. 1.15 Rugby League; preview of today's Regal Trophy Final. 1.25 Racing from Ascot; 1.35 The Steel Plates and Sections Handicap Chase. 1.45 Skiing: World Cup men's downhill action from Kitzbuhel, Austria. 2.00 Racing from Ascot; 2.10 the Victor Chandler Handicap Steeple Chase. 2.25 Speed Skating: British Short Track Championship from Guildford. 2.45 Rugby League: Wigan vs St Helens. Live coverage of the Regal Trophy Final from the Alfred McAlpine stadium in Huddersfield. See *The Big Match*, above. 3.45 Football Half-time. 3.55 Rugby League. 4.40 Final Score (54277869).
- 5.20 News; Weather (637348).
- 5.30 Local News, Weather (637348).
- 5.35 Dad's Army. An unexploded bomb is discovered in the vault of Captain Mainwaring's bank (R) (638416). *
- 6.05 Jim Davidson's Generation Game. Bill Pertwee agrees to be a guest (S) (990665). *
- 7.00 Noel's House Party. Patsy Palmer is set up for a Golcha (S) (553058).
- 7.50 The National Lottery Live. Bonnie Tyler is Antares' little helper (S) (164042).
- 8.05 Casualty. An Asian girl is attacked with a broken bottle, as Ash claims the decks for a romantic storyline (S) (159579). *
- 8.55 News and Sport; Weather (Followed by National Lottery Update) (920955).
- 9.15 *EMM A Passion for Murder* (Neil Fearnley 1992 US). Entirely missable thriller whereby Joanna Pacula (Gorky Park) goes on the run when her political lover is murdered, and is chased towards the Canadian border by both police and the mob. Michael Mori is the taxi driver hired to take her there. You have no such obligation (S) (425868). *
- 10.45 Match of the Day. Tottenham Hotspur vs Manchester City and Leeds United vs West Ham United (S) (9552787).
- 11.50 *EMM Spaceballs* (Mel Brooks 1987 US). Tardy spoof of Star Wars in the Brooklin manner: beautiful Princess Vespa must be rescued from the evil clutches of arch-villain, Lord Dark Helmet – sort of thing. John Candy, Rick Moranis and Bill Pullman obviously didn't have anything better to do that week (S) (881936).
- 1.20 Weather (7288761). To 1.25am.
- REGIONS: Wales: 4.55pm Wales on Saturday. 5.30 Wales on Saturday. NI: 5.30 Inside Ulster News.

BBC2

- 8.05 Open University: Preparatory Maths: Algebra (4563684). 8.20 Environment: The Heat Is On (8166668). 8.45 The Magic Flute (9715771).
- 9.10 Women in Science and Technology (4407961). 9.35 Me, A Student? (5054665).
- 10.00 Nada Nada. Pakistani comedy starring Babra Sharif (63717400).
- 11.50 Film 96 with Barry Norman. Seven, Showgirls and Devil in a Blue Dress re-Bazza'd (R) (5741210).
- 12.20 *EMM The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor 1940 US). "A paste diamond with more flash and sparkle than a true one," according to Pauline Kael, but it's everyone's favourite paste diamond. Katherine Hepburn sends up her then-icy public persona by playing the impossibly demanding Tracy Lord, brought down to earth and the level of humanity by her former husband Cary Grant and lovesick journalist James Stewart (315752). *
- 2.10 *EMM The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford 1962 US). Over-long, overacted Ford western in which James Stewart's Eastern attorney gets an unequalled reputation for heroism when he shoots sadistic cattle-baron henchman Lee Marvin while passing through the Old West. John Wayne and Vera Miles co-star, although Edmond Gero's picture is a boozy newspaper editor (861961).
- 4.10 *Best of Esther*. You should see the worst (R) (S) (5530435).
- 4.40 *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Grandparents claim their own children don't make suitable parents (R) (7170942). *
- 5.20 *TOTP2* (S) (7104416).
- 6.05 One Man and His Dog. And that's just the viewing figures. But seriously. We're in Cumbria for the finale. Last in series (S) (354329). *
- 6.50 News and Sport; Weather (935416). *
- 7.05 The Zambezi with Sandi Toksvig. Recycled travelogue with the hearty comedienne (R) (5) (280590). *
- 8.05 *The Trial*. The ground-breaking series in which cameras were allowed into a Scottish court for the first time. The team revisit the lawyers, the victims and the defendants to see how they've fared since the original programmes were broadcast (R) (712435). *
- 9.00 *Knowing Me, Knowing You... with Alan Partridge* (R) (5329). *
- 9.30 Peter York's Eighties. Property. See Preview, above (33690). *
- 10.00 *High Spirits* (Neil Jordan 1988 US). *Beetlejuice* meets Eustace-style whimsy in Jordan's tale of a haunted Irish castle owned by eccentric squire Peter O'Toole, and the American tourists who agree to stay there. Daryl Hannah makes a beautiful ghost (653131). *
- 11.35 *EMM Olivier Olivier* (Agnieszka Holland 1991 Fr). A young boy goes missing in mysterious circumstances and, equally mysteriously, reappears six years later. Is he the same lad, or an imposter? (844503). To 1.30am.

ITV/London

- 6.00 GMTV. 6.00 News; Weather. 6.10 Re:Win.d. 6.40 Eat Your Words. 7.10 Barney and Friends. 7.45 Saturday Disney. 8.15 Mighty Morphin Power Rangers (2854400).
- 9.25 *Telegraphic Investigation* (4808942).
- 10.25 It's Not Just Saturday. Dannii Minogue is the hostess (S) (4015936).
- 11.30 *The Chart Show* (R) (S) (63961).
- 12.30 *Plantsastic* (S) (44752).
- 1.00 News; Weather (73468706). *
- 1.10 Movies, Games and Videos. Games include *Virtua Fighter 2* (3209195).
- 1.40 *EMM The Thomas Crown Affair* (Norman Jewison 1968 US). Modish, shallow but good-natured heist movie best remembered for the theme song and the split-screen credit sequence. Steve McQueen is likeable as the bored playboy who organises a bank robbery, then seduces the insurance agent (a bizarrely-dressed Faye Dunaway), sent to investigate the crime (93011139).
- 3.45 *Airwolf* (R) (300145).
- 4.45 News, Sport; Weather (3404481). *
- 5.05 Local News, Sport (3216145). *
- 5.20 *New Baywatch*. The swimsuit models go to the rescue of some drunk kids involved in a boating accident (9619874). *
- 6.15 *Gladiators*. The Ashes. Don't you wish (S) (835416). *
- 7.15 *Blind Date*. What happened to Kerrie and Tony in the Bahamas? (Including Lottery Result) (S) (751400).
- 8.15 *Raise the Roof*. This rather unsatisfactory game show finishes by dangling a £100,000 house on the Costa del Sol in front of the contestants. Won't be missed, despite the presence of nice, blameless Bob Holness (S) (151706). *
- 8.45 News; National Lottery Update; Weather (794477). *
- 9.00 *The Bare Necessities*. Newly unemployed Yorkshire miners become strippers in this raucously enjoyable pilot episode for a new drama. See Preview, above (7226).
- 10.00 *Jack Dee's Saturday Night*. Julian Clary, Björk and the Pretenders are the glam one's guests (S) (207400). *
- 10.45 *Big Fight Live*. Henry Wharton defends his European super-middleweight title against Vincenzo Nardello of Italy (872049).
- 11.30 *Funny Business* (11077).
- 12.00 *Pyjama Party*. Katie Puckrik and gal chums (S) (2221375).
- 1.25 *EMM Mischief* (Mel Damski 1985 US). Emotional comedy, set – for no good reason – in the 1950s. Imagine a nostalgic version of *Porkeyes*. Then go to bed (943676).
- 3.05 *God's Gift* (R) (9607462).
- 4.05 *Shift* (Followed by Night Shift) (R) (2535269).
- 5.05 *Coach* (R) (S) (2-79256).
- 5.30 News (67895). To 6.00am.

Channel 4

- 6.05 *Sesame Street* (R) (2361597).
- 7.05 *Ulysses 31* (R) (343957).
- 7.30 *Super Mario Brothers* (R) (40077).
- 8.00 *Trans World Sport* (47110).
- 9.00 *The Morning Line*. Horse-racing news (S) (36495).
- 10.00 *Blitz*. American football news (39961).
- 11.00 *Gazetta Football Italia*. Italian football news (53597).
- 12.00 *The Late Late Show* (S) (14023).
- 12.30 *EMM Jitterbugs* (Malcolm St Clair 1943 US). Laurel and Hardy were on the downward curve when they revamped their 1933 movie *Arizona to Broadway* to conclude their 100th film together. They play a two-man jitterbug band trying to help singer Vivian Blane and her mother recover \$10,000 from confidence tricksters (5271042).
- 1.50 Channel 4 Racing from Warwick and Leopoldstown. Warwick, 2.00 Edward Courage Cup Handicap Chase; Leopoldstown, 2.20 the Ladbrooke Hurdle. Warwick, 2.35 Westminster Motor Insurance Insurance Novices' Chase; Leopoldstown, 2.50 the McCain's Handicap. Warwick, 3.05 Total National Handicap Chase; 3.40 Warwick Gold Card Handicap Hurdle (S) (5958123).
- 4.00 *Last Train to Medicine Hat*. Off-show, but softly enjoyable travelogue in which Murray Sayle rides the trans-Canada railroad (R) (8323229). *
- 5.05 *Brookside* (S) (2053110). *
- 6.30 *Right to Reply*. The Chinese authorities deny the accusations contained in *Return to the Dying Room*, while there's grief about the change of title music on *Countdown* and the open platform for celebs offered by *The Andrew Neil Show* (S) (7711).
- 7.00 *A Week in Politics*. Frank Field on the stakeholders' democracy proposed by Tony Blair in his recent trip to the Far East (9634).
- 8.00 *Divine Magic*. A history of myths and legends, mysteries and superstitions, miracles and mysticisms begins with voodoo, a belief system shared by some 40 million people worldwide. See Preview, above (S) (1232). *
- 9.00 *Audrey Hepburn*. Continuing the rerun second series – and the bristles help Barry with his kitchen extension. But where is Hazel, Barry's bride-to-be? (1192226). *
- 10.05 *Father Ted*. Cult sitcom about some housewives' Irish priests (R) (233752). *
- 10.35 *EMM The Stepford Wives* (Bryan Forbes 1975 US). Suspicious treatment of Ira Levin's bestseller about suburban housewives taking a turn for the robotic. See *The Big Picture*, above (6024769). *
- 12.40 *Late Licence*: Devil Man. Manga nonsense from Tokyo (S) (4688085).
- 1.45 *Twilight Zone* (S) (50578).
- 2.15 *Big Girl's blouse* (42559).
- 2.45 *FYI* (9657511).
- 3.20 *Beat Specials*: The Red Hot Chili Peppers (R) (9674288). To 4.20am.

Radio

Radio 1
67.50MHz FM
7.00am Kevin Greening 10.00
Dave Pearce 12.30 Danny Baker
2.30 Jo Whiley 5.00 John Peel
7.00 Lovegrove Dance Party
with Danny Sampson 9.00 Radio 1
1.00 Show 12.00 Essential Mix
2.00 Annie Nightingale's Chill Out Zone 4.00-7.00am Lynn Parsons

Radio 2

88.2MHz FM
6.00am Mo Gutra 8.05 Brian

Matthew 8.30 Julie Spence

12.00 Haynes on Saturday 1.30

Change at Optoeprho 2.40 Martin

Kelner on Saturday 4.00 Nick

Barraclough 5.00 Tom Paxton on

Concert 6.00 Lifestyle 7.00 The

Story Behind... The Music Man

7.30 The Music Man 10.00

Sheridan Smith 12.05 Charles

News 4.00-6.00 Jo Datta

Radio 3

90.22MHz FM

7.00am Record Review. With

Jonathan Swain. Martinu: Con-

certo for oboe and small or-

chestra; Schumann: Piano

Quintet in E flat. Tippett: Con-

certo for double string or-

chestra, Schostakovich's cello

concertos from Truls Mørk.

10.15 Record Release. Copland:

Symphonic Ode. Rachmaninov:

Etudes-tableaux Op. 33: No 2

In C; No 6 in E flat minor; No

9 in C sharp minor (Leif Ove

Andsnes, piano); Shostakovich:

The Limpid Stream (Act 21).

11.15 Reissues. Leo Black the

alt-folk great strings quartet,

including the Hollywood and

Smelana groups.

</div

Blair and Clarke: are they by chance related?

No politician shifts a society single-handedly, by sheer force of personality. The trick is to spot the trend, sense the mood of a society, capture it, mould it, describe it, and then claim the credit for it.

That is what Margaret Thatcher did in the Eighties. In an era that saw the world opening up to global competition, her advocacy of free markets, privatisation and lower taxation were of the moment and defined that moment. As a result, "Thatcherism" gained hegemony in the country and eventually succeeded in converting her political opponents in the process. It spread throughout the Anglo-Saxon world, Europe, Asia and the post-Communist states. This was an extraordinarily successful exercise in dividing and appropriating the *Zeitgeist*.

But what next? The struggle to differentiate Britain's main political parties - creating blue or red water between them - demonstrates the lack of a fresh Big Idea. We are halfway through the Nineties, with no new map to plot our course.

This week Tony Blair and (making a comeback) Margaret Thatcher set about changing all that. They offered themselves as cartographers of the decade. The Labour leader went to Singapore and sent back a message that a "stakeholder society" was the way forward for Britain. Meanwhile, Baroness Thatcher returned to the legacy of her guru, Keith Joseph, and set out her two key ideas for the Nineties: shrinking the state and creating an anti-European Little England.

These ideas are desperately vague. It is hard to know what a stakeholder society means: Mr Blair, perhaps deliberately, has done little to

resolve the confusion. It is just as difficult to know how Lady Thatcher would achieve her ends, which have until now been beyond British politicians. In power, she herself committed Britain to its present involvement with Europe and failed to reduce the level of national income spent by the state.

Yet vagueness is not necessarily fatal to new ideas. When Margaret Thatcher took office in 1979, she did not have a grand plan; she had a basic set of principles that chimed with popular opinion and were to underpin the specific policies of the following decade. The vital question is: do any of these ideas, or aspects of them, strike a chord today? In 10 years time, will they, like Eighties Thatcherism, be big enough to label an era?

Mr Blair's stakeholder society, for all its haziness, certainly resonates. Commentators have been intrigued by the word. The notion of everyone having a stake in society makes sense. It seems to describe an inclusive country, in which everyone has roots and a say over what happens. We need these notions at a time when competition and globalisation are tearing apart the glue that holds society together.

Jobs for life and the traditional welfare state are both under threat. They are increasingly seen as expensive luxuries at a time when flexible workforces and low taxation, financing a minimalist state, are said to be the key to maintaining competitiveness. As a result, social cohesion - vital for stability and economic productivity - is in danger as crime rises and an underclass of the disadvantaged and disaffected develops. Britain



along with other countries, needs a way of building a humane society in a global era.

But there is plenty of suspicion that the stakeholder idea is no more than a repackaging of failed Labour policies. It invokes the idea of empowering groups or individuals who have a claim to be included in decision-making. But if Mr Blair merely intends to reinvigorate the power of trade unions and other institutions that ran the corporate state of the Seventies, then he has made a big mistake. Indeed, even if this was not intention, Mr Blair may have made a political error in resurrecting Labour's old ghosts.

He has, by implication, associated himself with a body of literature about stakeholding in companies that says businesses should be run not only in the interests of shareholders, but of customers, employees, consumers and suppliers. This may sound wonderful in theory, but over-regulation could suffocate business and enterprise in much the same way as Labour's last failed exercise in economic micro-management - nationalisation.

In short, stakeholding may have nothing to do with the trends of the time, which are towards deregulation, free markets, individualism and increased competitiveness. But there is one version that might catch on, namely the notion that everyone should have their own individual stake in the welfare state. That could mean compulsory saving for state-overseen pensions schemes, vouchers for education and perhaps even new ways of establishing rights to treatment in the NHS.

If this is what Mr Blair means, then he may

be on to a Big Idea, albeit a controversial one, that could prove politically impossible to implement. It would convert the welfare state into a system that was socially inclusive, but did not necessarily guarantee equality and which paid out more on the basis of lifetime contribution than need. It would represent a marriage of choice with collectivism, of self-reliance with state support, while giving people a greater sense of owning their entitlements. And it would permit a shift away from conventional taxation, to claims by the state being earmarked for specific purposes.

If this is the direction in which Mr Blair is moving, there are good grounds for believing that his ideas will have wider resonance. Indeed he will find plenty of fellow travellers on the Tory left. Much of what Mr Blair has to say about social inclusion and economic pragmatism echoes the language used by Kenneth Clarke: "The pace of change has created fears and uncertainties among men and women in every walk of life. A strong welfare state has an important role in reducing these fears." So said the Chancellor in his Mais Lecture 18 months ago.

In short, the chief British political divide may not be between Labour and the Tories, but between the Blair/Clarke philosophy - Blarism - and Margaret Thatcher (and her acolytes), who this week made her bid to be the architect of the next decade, just as she was of the last.

Who will win? We cannot be sure. But the ideas that will triumph and eventually engulf all parties will be those that best ensure our survival in today's global, competitive market.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A&E wards: conditions that take a toll on doctors' morale

From Dr Julian Eyeas

Sir: I strongly disagree with your assertion that junior doctors should be "press-ganged" into working in Accident and Emergency departments (leading article, 11 January).

I spent six months in two casualty departments in south-east London and I would rather resign my profession than do it again.

Notwithstanding being twice assaulted by patients I was trying to help, having the door of my treatment room kicked in by a man angered by the fact that my dying patient had jumped the queue ahead of his broken finger, and my writing table taken away by hospital management on the grounds that the doctors were "spending too much time writing", I was allowed two weekends out of 11 free, and was almost always working anti-social hours.

The stark reality is that not enough doctors wish to work in the NHS anymore, especially in A&E. A significant number of my contemporaries have been so disillusioned that they have left medicine altogether.

Your leader demonstrates a public misconception: that doctors are some sort of breed

apart of medical soldiers, ready to be drafted into any situation. Doctors are actually human beings. They have loved ones, emotions and outside lives. They don't want to work in A&E because the conditions are frequently so inhuman that they take an unacceptable toll on their private and professional lives.

Yours faithfully,
JULIAN EYEAS
London, SW2

From Dr E. J. Martin

In your leading article (11 January) you fail to mention one of the major factors leading to a shortage of accident and emergency junior doctors in England - the great shortage of doctors training to be general practitioners.

The Royal College of General Practitioners encourages GPs in training to do six months in A&E. However, the number of doctors training to become GPs has fallen by nearly 25 per cent over the past few years.

Recently, more surgery is carried out on a day-care basis, with a patient being discharged on the same day as their operation. Large psychiatric hospitals are being closed up and

down the country. In some cases, patients are cared for at home under the "hospital at home" scheme. When these patients are discharged the work that was previously done in the hospital is added to the tasks of the GP.

At the same time, the GP is having to get involved in purchasing the care for his patients. If one adds to this the increased requirements for health screening, the flood of paper now required by the Government about all our activities, the great increase in litigation against GPs and the increased demand for services at weekends and at nights, it is clear that the job of a GP has both changed and expanded hugely.

Young doctors see this great increase in work required of GPs, with no increase in income and a lowering of public esteem in the profession, and they decide not to enter family medicine. It is this lack of family doctors in training which is perhaps the most important factor in the understaffing of our accident departments.

If the Government will not learn this lesson, the present crisis will be repeated again and again.

Yours,
E. J. MARTIN
Bedford
11 January

From Mr Hugh J. Thomson

Sir: The crisis of beds and staffing in the NHS in recent days has been precipitated by a dramatic increase in the number of emergency admissions, and the reason for this is not clear. What is clear is that many of the difficulties in responding to this crisis result from the changes in the health service over the past few years.

The NHS is being turned into a National Health Business. To run a business successfully there must be no slack in the system: every employee and every piece of equipment need to be working to the limit. This is not so when it comes to people's health. There are epidemics and accidents, emergencies and uncertainties. There has to be a spare capacity to cope with the unpredictability of dealing with human beings and their distress.

If the Government will not learn this lesson, the present crisis will be repeated again and again.

Yours,
HUGH J. THOMSON
Consultant Surgeon
Birmingham
11 January

Heaven is a place on earth

From Mr Norman Myers

Sir: In your leading article "The church's empty hell" (11 January), you refer to the erroneous impression of Hell as "a place of endless torment". If Heaven is a place of ultimate being for and with others, could Hell be, as T. S. Eliot said, the place of only self-hence of ultimate torment through total emptiness?

In similar style, could it be that the next world, whether up or down, will not be so very different from this one? If, as is sometimes suggested, Heaven is peaches and cream, there will be scant scope for such basic attributes as compassion, empathy and related forms of fellow feeling. Equally to the point, if one cannot make oneself happy in the here and now, what true hope for the next time around? And if one becomes adept at making oneself miserable through self-preoccupation here, might that also prove fine training for the next world?

After all, if we pray "Thy kingdom come on Earth" and recall that "The kingdom of Heaven is within you", then could there be similar potential for the kingdom of Hell? To

this extent, it should not really matter to us here whether there is another life ahead: a life lived to the full, and in the one way that some believe makes that feasible, is surely its own reward.

Yours,
NORMAN MYERS
Honorary Visiting Fellow
Green College
Oxford
12 January

From Dr Richard Ladle

Sir: Contrary to the views of the Church of England's doctrine commission ("Church elders pour cold water on hellfire and damnation", 11 January) many people, as yet unfettered by Christianity, look forward to the "annihilation" at the end of a busy life, and would consider eternal existence (dissorporated or not) as purgatorial.

The commissioners' opinions seem nothing more than whistling in the dark while the monster of modern science breathes heavily in the corner of the room.

Yours (un)faithfully,
RICHARD J. LADLE
London, N1
11 January

DAVID AARONOVITCH

Hell on Earth



The week has come to a bad

end. Hard upon the news that the remaining Sex Pistols are making a comeback after 18 years, and just before Mrs Thatcher animated her audience of posthumous Keith Joseph admirers, came the Church's disavowal of punitive Hell. Can it be true, I wonder, that Johnny Rotten and Kenneth Baker are both to escape eternal punishment? No demons with pliers, no Boschian monsters by whom to be eaten and then excreted, none of the fates which one had mentally stored up for the offensive and the morally deficient?

No threat of damnation will therefore prevent the coming together of Britain's most notorious punk band - even if God has already taken care of the complex bassist, Sid Vicious. The other bands of the era are long gone, the young men to become journalists and wheelwrights, the girls to take up veterinary nursing, or (as in the case of Poly Styrene, "Oh Bondage, Up Yours" fame) to devote themselves to Krishna consciousness. Only John Lydon et al have apparently betrayed their art to become "accomplished musicians". Next year they go on tour with all their old hits.

What will their act be like? As I am almost exactly a contemporary of theirs, I am painfully aware of my increasing limitations. Pogo-ing is technically feasible, but can only be done in five-second bursts with 10-minute rest periods, to allow the cartilage to pop back. Gobbing, too, is not what it was: age dries up the juices a bit, and it would take an awful lot of hawking to summon up anything worthwhile. Take it from me, boys, at 40, anarchic sexuality has to be carefully organised - a case of Try And Find The Bollocks.

But what is truly awful about the Sex Pistols' return is that it is a return. Unlike, say, the Rolling Stones or Bowie, who have kept at it and developed, Rotten & co are attempting to be their former selves, unchanged. Going on is OK, it's going back that is so appalling.

Consider this nightmare. The whole country indulges in a 1977 reunion, forced to resume the roles and lives we all led then. Except that we cannot become younger, or shed the experiences of the intervening years. So the elderly Jim Callaghan presides over a tottering cabinet, including Denis Healey, Michael Foot and Shirley Williams. An embittered David Owen is Foreign Secretary.

Margaret leads the Tories, not in her naivete, almost 1977 incarnation, but as she is now, with recessive gums, thyroidal eye-bulge and an enormous chip on her shoulder.

Jimmy Carter is just beginning his stint in the White House. As if this weren't bad enough, the whole country is invited to hold street parties in a ghastly post-Diana parody of the Queen's Silver Jubilee. British Leyland makes cars, a pontificating Geoff Boycott leads England out against the Aussies, turbu 40-plus footballers with Scouser moustaches panting contest the Cup Final, and Virginia Wade considers her way to victory over Chris Evert at Wimbledon.

A wrinkled, balding Woody Allen directs Diane Keaton in a comedy of sexual manners set in New York and featuring relationships with very young women - so no change there. Larry Holmes fights George Forman for the heavyweight championship of the world. Sorry, that's a bit far-fetched.

I am transported back to a grimy room in a student house in Ladbroke Grove, living off Birds Eye individual shepherd's pies and arguing about the let-cleaner rota. From time to time I am visited by various girlfriends whom I used and abused in those days. Except that now they have children and therapists, complain about the cleanliness of the sheets, talk about what they want out of sex and fail to fade away on demand.

No, Johnny. No, Maggie. There is no going back. To revisit the past, knowing what we now know, that surely wherever the bishops say - would be Hell.

QUOTE UNQUOTE

There is only one bright spot. Job insecurity is at its worst among Tory MPs and councillors as they watch their government tottering to the grave - Lord Hailsham, Labour peer. Once you have swum through the filth spewed out by the Conservative Central Office, you find you're in clean water and you can swim freely and say what you think - Emma Nicholson, encouraging others to defect from the Tories to the Liberal Democrats. The best thing everyone can do today is roll right over and go back to sleep - Radu Lupu, pianist in New York City, where residents awoke to snow banks up to six feet deep.

It's so cold you can see the fleshy fingers from a politician's mouth - David Letterman, US chat show host, on the Washington blizzard. Come back in place! I have a hip that hops out sometimes - Baroness Robson of Kiddington, Liberal Democrat, rising to speak in a Lords debate on alternative medicine.

As far as I can tell by their views on European federalism, such people's creed would be better described as 'No Nation Conservatism' - Lady Thatcher on 'One Nation' Tories.

As any taxi driver will tell you, whether you liked her or not, at least you knew where you were with Margaret Thatcher - Tony Blair.

Cattle at the cost of native species

From Dr Julian Eyeas

Sir: I was concerned by your report "Mad cows? Not out of Africa?" (10 January). The production of beef in the fragile arid regions of southern Africa where rinderpest, tsutsi fly and foot-and-mouth disease demand the segregation of cattle from wildlife (which have natural immunity to some diseases) has necessitated the construction of vast fences which prevent wildlife having access to their traditional water, grazing and migration routes.

This has resulted in terrible suffering to indigenous grazing animals and has decimated some species. Additionally, the degradation of natural grassland caused by livestock grazing is evident to anybody flying over Botswana. Furthermore, water management in Namibia by open canal forms a lethal barrier to movement of animals.

While British butchers may wish to avoid British beef because of their fear of BSE, perhaps the vegetarianism of butcher Ken Bell's grandchildren is a far better solution to the problem than his demanding Namibian beef.

Yours faithfully,
J. A. TIMMER
London, SE19

How to strip like a dream

From Mr N. Metcalfe

Sir: After failing, for over six months, to remove wallpaper from my house using a steam stripper and chemical wallpaper stripper, I had given up hope.

However, after experimenting, I discovered the most effective cure is wallpaper paste! One coat, left for 20 minutes, and the wallpaper is removed like a dream.

Yours irreducibly,
N. METCALFE
Sheffield
11 January



Carl Laubin's painting of the proposed redevelopment of Paternoster Square

struction industry, I had never seen anything so vast being built. At the time, it was obviously described as modern architecture and the shape of the future, but, even as a young lad, I thought it should have complemented St Paul's Cathedral. As St Paul's is one of our major tourist attractions, it would make the surrounding area that much more attractive if the new development and St Paul's could be thought of as one.

Yours faithfully,
JULIAN BASSETT
London, E13

From Mr B. W. Tullett

Sir: I have a personal interest in the development of Paternoster Square as I worked as a young teenager on the original development in the Sixties and, as it was my first job in the con-

struction industry, I had never seen anything so vast being built. At the time, it was obviously described as modern architecture and the shape of the future, but, even as a young lad, I thought it should have complemented St Paul's Cathedral. As St Paul's is one of our major tourist attractions, it would make the surrounding area that much more attractive if the new development and St Paul's could be thought of as one.

Yours faithfully,
B. W. TULETT
London, E13

From Mr Roger Houghton

Sir: The fault of the Paternoster Square scheme is not its neo-classicism but its attempt to hide behind a superficial and poorly executed layer of classical style.

The classical orders are as

J. M. H. 1996

elated

comment

Stung by a fly on the wall

A sad misjudgement has marred a fine term as head of the Royal Opera, argues Polly Toynbee

No one ever likes the image of themselves as revealed in fly-on-the-wall documentaries. Hundreds of hours of film are freeze-dried into moments of tension, friction, anger or anxiety, with scant context or explanation. *The House*, a six-part documentary about the Royal Opera House, starts on Tuesday on BBC2. The wonder of it is that a campy, seasoned old television band such as Jeremy Isaacs ever let the cameras backstage.

But those who know him understand precisely why he did it. It was a last, ill-judged bid to set right the one great failure of his eight years as General Director at Covent Garden: to make the Opera House beloved of the people. He wanted popular sentiment to swell with pride at this national treasure. Instead, those who presume to speak for the masses – the tabloids and the Terry Dickses – continue to heap contumely upon it.

He thought people should see the desperate backstage struggle to get shows on – and we do. Behind the plush, the place looks like the boiler room of a 50-year-old banana boat. Indeed, the drama of finding an unknown Carmen within hours of a crucial first night as the diva falls sick does convey the terror and the thrill of the whole bizarre enterprise.

But if Isaacs imagined this film would inspire admiration for a noble endeavour stretched to breaking point on a subsidy half that of the world's other great opera houses, he should have known better. The character who will be remembered is not the fragile little French Carmen, but the monstrous new public affairs director, who sacks everyone in sight and looks like an angry android in a Paul Smith suit.

This week Isaacs bumped into John Birt and Sir Christopher Bland dining in a restaurant. Birt asked him why he didn't like the film. Between gritted teeth, Isaacs parroted a well-known Britishism: "Because it suffers from

His most passionate supporters are those who have worked for him

happening places, while the Opera House reeked of mothball-scented furs. Now the ENO is in artistic trouble – short of ideas, enveloped in dark critical clouds. True, Isaacs has presided over some spectacular turkeys – but only a few, no more than the flip side of bravery.

He wanted to make opera accessible. When he introduced surtitles – simultaneous translations projected above the stage – the stuffed shirts complained of the vulgarity. Nowadays the only complaints come from those in seats where



Isaacs believes opera is for ordinary people. Now they will see his Opera House, warts and all

they can't see them properly. He curses the *Sur* and all those who patronise "ordinary" people by assuming them to be cloth-eared philistines. Don't they all know "Toreador" from *Carmen*, "Nessun Dorma", Mozart, Verdi, Puccini and a dozen other favourites? Hasn't the success of the three tenors shown how many "ordinary"

elitist nature of the business. This makes him edgy and uneasy. From a Labour-voting middle-class Hillhead family, he is the son of a GP mother and jeweller father – and a man of the left, somewhat left of New Labour. He is not even slightly seduced by the ritzy, glitzy world of the royal box.

He made his name in 1974 with *The World At War*, a 26-part blockbuster history of the Second World War, which reached audiences of 15 million. As the first head of Channel 4 in 1980, he opened up the institutionalised world of television to outsiders, new groups, experimenters and some lunatics. The result was a remarkable injection of energy. By helping to devise a system where the funding came from ITV, irrespective of ratings, it gave him the freedom to allow some outragous things to flourish.

So his move to the most establishment post in the arts world came as a shock. Why should this naturally rebellious man choose frock-coated opera? Because he is driven to spread his own passion for opera and ballet to a wider public. Alas, it has been a mission thwarted by an impossible dilemma: he spends millions of tax-payers' hard-earned

money, yet not millions enough to let in most ordinary tax-payers at prices they can afford. Those who come after him may fare better, for everyone expects the Lottery funding rules to change to allow money not just for buildings but to fund productions and cheap seats.

What will this television documentary do for Isaacs's reputation? No justice, say his friends, defensively. It doesn't help that he looks like a rumpled, slightly-the-worse-for-wear Beethoven. Or that he always says what he thinks, straight out. The scenes of apparent chaos and in-fighting tell only part of the story. "What artistic enterprise would ever get on to the stage in an atmosphere of total calm, harmony and managerial efficiency?" wonders one seasoned observer.

Isaacs's most passionate supporters are those who have worked for him, both when he was head of Channel 4 and at the Opera House. His detractors are among the boards and governors he has worked for, which is, on the whole, the best way round: "He lacks some essential political skills for a job like this," says one. But another, who worked under him at Channel 4 retaliates: "A complete hero!"

If it's American snow, it's gotta be big

Rupert Cornwell reflects on a week of chaos, cold and unaccustomed quiet in the US capital

For me, the first intimation came exactly a week ago in the departure lounge at Zurich airport, as we returned from a skiing holiday. "Seems there's a big storm coming to the Eastern US," said someone, perusing the *International Herald Tribune*. Sure, I thought, another phoney Washington weather drama. Only this time the panic-mongers were right.

Back in DC that frigid Saturday afternoon the atmosphere was eerie, nervous yet fatalistic, as if an irresistible invading army was at the city's gates. People were glancing intermittently at a still, leaden sky. When I went to buy a few provisions, the supermarket was jammed. For the first time I bought some rock salt, a five-pound bag, which the blurb claimed could dissolve 48 times its weight in snow at a temperature of 30F. That should do the trick, I thought. A child taking on the Wehrmacht with a pop-gun would have stood a better chance.

The United States is a country of meteorological superlatives. In five years I have reported on the most destructive hurricane in modern American history (the 155mph Andrew, of August 1992, which caused \$20bn of damage), the Great Flood of the summer of 1993 (the Midwest's worst for 100 years), plus droughts, heatwaves, tornadoes, and sundry other acts of God. And now the Blizzard of '96.

The misfortune of Washington and the Mid-Atlantic region in winter is to be point of collision between warm air moving north from the Gulf of Mexico and arctic blasts descending from Canada, all mixed with plenty of moisture from the Atlantic. Thus are assembled the ingredients for a smorgasbord of precipitations: snow, freezing rain, sleet and hail, or various combinations of them. Most miserable of all is the ice storm, a Washington speciality, which in full spate produces a sinister rustling like wind through dry leaves. It turns roads and pavements into skating rinks and causes power failures by the score. Thus far, the Blizzard of '96 has generated only fine powdery snow. But never, even during the four years I lived in Moscow, have I seen so much of it in a single helping.

It started to fall around midnight on Saturday. It continued, soft and silent as a veil, through Sunday and half of Monday. By the end, in my corner of the city, 23 inches had fallen – almost two feet of the stuff, and more where it had been piled up by gusts of 35mph. Not for an instant did it stop, for 36 hours. Should the second storm, unfolding as I write, live up to billing, all records could be eclipsed, including that of 28

January 1772, when George Washington measured three feet of snow on the ground at his Mount Vernon estate.

Even if this is not the storm of the century already, it's close. Philadelphia's 31 inches between Sunday and Monday was the largest 24-hour snowfall in its history. New York's 22 inches was its third largest (100 million tons fell on the city, according to CNN). It was the third or fourth highest here in the capital. The 20-hour shutdown of Boston airport was the longest since 1978. Economic losses are climbing by billions of dollars a day. At least 100 have died as a result of the snow.

Washington is peculiarly ill-equipped for such

an ordeal. Come the first soft flakes of winter, the city fathers handle snow with the same calm and competence that British Rail brings to its commuter services. An inch or two that would not raise an eyebrow in Moscow (or New England) throws the capital of the free world into delirium tremens. These days, with the District of Columbia in receivership and possessing just a third of the functioning snow-clearing equipment of four years ago, the performance has been even more dire than usual.

Four days on from the blizzard, the bus and underground still barely work. Schools are closed. Mountains of half-cleared snow and mighty rivers of slush have turned Washington's

streets into a cross country course from the Winter Olympics.

The first sensation, of course, was utterly different. That Sunday morning, the snow was therapeutic, a humbling, cleansing reassurance that there was an alternative to the frenetic pace of American life. No prospect was more beautiful than the dreaded Washington Beltway, normally a white-knuckle commuting racetrack, transformed into an empty sea of snow, the road signs poking like fragments from the *Titanic* on the ocean bed. Closer to home, not a squeak of brakes, not a single car horn was to be heard, just the quiet occasional hiss of skiers gliding past white mounds that had once been cars. The airports, too, those temples to our times, were shut. For all its technical wizardry, America was at a standstill.

But the charm of a blizzard wears off quickly.

And patience wears thin with the TV weather forecasters and their glossy coiffures, spray-on smiles and professional shortcomings that no computer graphics can redem.

They completely missed, for instance, Tuesday's follow-up storm

(sheepishly described afterwards as an "unanticipated high-level atmospheric disturbance") which dumped another four inches on DC.

By Thursday, the skis were off the streets and the car was king again, the only difference being that the pedestrian's normal refuge of the pavement was unreachable, still submerged by two feet of snow. Yet the crown fit ameasly. Driving your car is fine, but where to leave it?

In Washington right now, the most prized asset of all is a viable parking space.

Belatedly, snow ploughs have cleared a passable corridor along the middle of the streets in my neighbourhood. But parking is a do-it-yourself and highly labour-intensive proposition. "I dug it, and I park in it," read one sign guarding a 6ft by 12ft area carved out of the surrounding tundra. Others stake out their territory with chairs and tables.

Even if you can shift the snow, where do you put it? In New York they've been dumping it into the Hudson River, but a Boston real-estate firm was less lucky when it ploughed clean snow into the harbour – only to be slapped with a \$1,000 fine for environmental pollution.

And now it's falling again. Eight inches, say the weathermen, maybe snow, maybe sleet, maybe ice, probably all three together. In Los Angeles, they're having a heatwave; the other day it was a record 87 degrees on Venice Beach. But we snowsick on the other side of the country should not get too upset. Over there, there's probably an earthquake on the way.



White-out in Washington: nearly two feet of fine, powdery snow fell in 36 hours

One nation, divided

Lady Thatcher has got Tory and Liberal traditions in a bit of a muddle, says Vernon Bogdanor

"Say what you will," Disraeli's hero Egremont declares in *Sybil* (1845), "our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed." "Which nation?" asks Morley, the Chartist, "for she reigns over two." "You speak of . . ." said Egremont hastily. "THE RICH AND THE POOR."

Concert of Europe". Like the Liberal Democrats today, he would have been a strong supporter of European Union as the best means of overcoming national rivalries.

Gladstone was a strong supporter also of devolution, declaring that societies were held together through "recognition of the distinctive qualities of the separate parts of great countries". He even favoured the creation of what he called "intermediate bodies" – regional parliaments, which John Major has called "barmy". Here at least, Margaret Thatcher and the Prime Minister can agree. But it is difficult to regard their position as being at all Gladstonian.

Historians will probably see the Eighties as an era of Thatcherite dominance. Yet, in her two landslide elections – 1983 and 1987 – the Conservatives were unable to secure more than 42 per cent of the vote.

Margaret Thatcher found herself presiding over two nations

Nearly three-fifths of the population were hostile to Margaret Thatcher even at the height of her power.

Thatcherism, moreover, appealed more to the south of England than to Scotland or Wales or the industrial conurbations. By 1987, the Conservatives, despite their majority of 102 in the Commons, were able to secure only 10 of the 72 seats in Scotland, and eight of the 38 in Wales. In the great conurbations – Bradford, Glasgow, Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield – the Conservatives won just three of the 43 seats.

Thatcherism was perhaps as much a consequence as a cause of socio-economic and cultural changes that long prefigured the Eighties, as Britain came to be polarised along geographical lines. Margaret Thatcher found herself presiding over two nations divided as much by geography as by class. The upwardly mobile, thrusting and ambitious nation living in the South-east provided her landside majorities. For the other nation, she never seemed to care very much.

The writer is reader in government, Oxford University. His *Essay on Politics and the Constitution* is being published by Dartmouth shortly.

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Pension funds clash in City revolution

JOHN EISENHAMMER
Financial Editor

Britain's powerful pension funds placed themselves on a collision course with the City's big market makers after throwing their weight behind Stock Exchange proposals for a radical reform of share trading in London.

The pension funds, which own some 35 per cent of UK equity, support introducing automatic order-driven dealing to the top FTSE stocks. "The investment committee would be very content to see an alternative method of dealing on the Stock Exchange, and if it is order-driven then we believe it will offer lower prices," said the National Association of Pension Funds.

"Effectively what we are after are lower costs and an effective dealing system," said a leading insurance fund manager.

The Stock Exchange yesterday published its long-awaited consultation document about exactly what sort of order-matching system is wanted by most market participants and how it should be introduced. It sets out detailed options of how the fully automatic order-driven facility, which electronically matches bids and offers, might take over from, or be combined with, London's traditional quote-driven system, whereby market-making firms use their capital to quote firm buy and sell prices for shares.

The published document differs in one important respect following the sacking last week of Michael Lawrence from his post of chief executive of the Exchange. His preference for a "hybrid", combining the two systems on the same screen, has been markedly toned down. The big market-makers, which

played an important role in Mr Lawrence's sacking, argued that this option was impractical. "Putting the two systems together on this same screen will have the inevitable effect of capital being withdrawn from the FTSE 100. Of course investors can say they would like a choice of competing systems for the same stocks, so they can pick the cheapest. But the question is whether practitioners find it worth their while to participate in that, I think not," said a leading market-maker.

The tone of the consultation document points rather to the more radical of the options, which is to replace the quote-driven system with an order-matching facility across the board for all stocks. Alongside it, however, there would be a so-called block trading facility, whereby the market makers would be able to take on and sell large blocks of shares off the market. This is the mechanism successfully operated in centres such as New York and Paris.

The document also offers the option of an order book for some stocks and a quote book for others. "Ask a fund manager and he will want order-driven for the big stocks to get cheaper dealing costs and quote-driven for small stocks to make sure he can always deal. Ask a market maker and he will want it precisely the other way round. That is the dilemma to overcome," said a top market trader.

Private client brokers and small investors have strongly urged keeping some form of market-making in the smaller stocks. The Stock Exchange said that small investors should benefit from cheaper dealing in popular stocks with an order-driven system.

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Stalemate in transatlantic talks maintains limits on foreign stakes in American carriers



Drawing the line: BA chief Robert Ayling has ruled out more investment in its US partner - at least for the present

CITY & BUSINESS EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

Investment: The world turned upside down
Fears grow of British Gas dividend cut
Market Report: New York unhinges London

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Granada dividend 'falls foul of IR'

Forte yesterday cast doubt on whether a special dividend of 47p offered by Granada as part of its £3.8bn hostile takeover bid for the hotels and restaurants company would be allowed by Inland Revenue, writes Mathew Horsman.

The criticisms, dismissed by Granada as "mischievous", centred on Forte's contention that tax authorities could rule against the plan because shareholders are given an option between a dividend or cash.

"We have taken tax advice that suggests this plan may not be approved," a Forte spokesman said.

But in a statement, Granada's chief executive, Gerry Robinson, said: "There is nothing that Forte has said that was not considered by us before we announced our increased offer".

The special dividend was announced last week as part of Granada's revised offer for Forte. The higher bid was worth 362p in cash per Forte share, or 373p in cash and shares. Tax-exempt institutions, including pension funds, could receive up to 385p a share because of the tax credit associated with the special dividend, Granada argued.

Forte also claimed that Granada's plan to sell up to £2bn worth of Forte's assets, including its Meridian and Exclusive hotel chains, would attract £400m in tax. Granada responded that a combination of Granada's "substantial tax cost base" in Forte, the roll-over of gains into new expenditure and the availability of £240m in tax losses which it can carry forward would make the tax consequences of the planned disposals "insignificant".

Meanwhile, Granada launched a further attack on Forte's planned share buy-back scheme, which it believes would be earnings negative on profit forecasts. It questioned whether Forte could afford its alternative generous dividend promise of 20 per cent yearly increases in each of the next three years.

BA halts further investment in USAir

RUSSELL HOTTON

British Airways has abandoned plans to invest more money in USAir until the UK and US governments settle their long-running dispute over liberalising aviation markets.

BA has until the end of January to decide whether to put another \$200m into the troubled American carrier. But it would be unable to lift its shareholding above the 25 per cent limit on foreign ownership imposed by US regulators.

The British flag-carrier has already paid \$400m for 24.6 per cent of USAir, and the option would have enabled it to take

that shareholding to 34.8 per cent. But the stalemate in the negotiations to liberalise the Bermuda II treaty governing transatlantic aviation means further investment would be too

soon. The UK government was "puzzled and disappointed" after US negotiators broke off talks last year over more access to Heathrow, Gatwick and the American domestic airline market. A Department of Transport spokesman said yesterday that no further talks were planned.

Analysts were divided over whether the UK airline should put more money into USAir - part of BA's strategy of creating

a global network of financial and operational alliances.

BA's new chief executive, Robert Ayling, has not so far gone public on the future of the relationship. But one company source said yesterday: "There is little point in us putting more money into USAir unless we can increase our shareholding." The company has a further option to invest \$250 within the next two years.

USAir was badly hit by re-

cession in the American airline industry, but has seen its fortunes slowly improve. Last month Seth Schofield, USAir's departing chairman, said the company was now able to stand

on its own two feet and did not need further money from BA.

Under the Bermuda II treaty, governing Britain's demand to lift the foreign ownership ceiling. In turn Britain has refused the main US demand for open access to London Heathrow.

The last round of talks broke up without agreement in October, closing another chapter in over four years of bitter negotiations.

Last year British Airways wrote off half its investment in USAir, after earlier saying it

would not make any additional investment until USAir's financial position had improved. USAir recently moved

back into profit as a result of cost-cutting and a generally stronger market, and has predicted it will post a profit for 1995, its first positive result since 1985.

The company made profits of \$21.6m in the third quarter, on a 10 per cent increase in revenues, from \$1.75bn to \$1.87bn.

"There can be no doubt that this company is now experiencing a dramatic upturn in its financial performance," Mr Schofield said at the time.

USAir provides BA with an entry into the biggest domestic airline market in the world, and may be central to an eventual link-up with American Airlines.

IN BRIEF

£500m prison contracts

Tarmac, Costain and Securicor are among the companies which have won contracts to build two prisons in the UK worth over £250m each. Group 4 and Tarmac will build the Fazakerley prison in Liverpool and a consortium called SSA, which includes Securicor and Costain, will build Bridgend prison near Port Talbot, Wales.

New South Wales Electricity chief

Welsh Water is to appoint John Roberts, formerly of Marwell, as chief executive of South Wales Electricity on the completion of its bid for the company. Mr Roberts was chief executive of Manweb until its takeover by Scottish Power in 1995.

Tomkins merger still delayed

Tomkins, the British conglomerate, and US car components group Gates said they were confident that last month's proposed merger would still go ahead as planned. The companies had hoped to sign contracts by the end of December, but a couple of technical issues "unrelated to the businesses" remain outstanding.

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Woolwich could face predators

NIC CUTTIN

Speculation grew in the City last night that Woolwich Building Society could be snapped up by a rival institution before its plans to become a bank are complete next year.

Potential bidders named by analysts yesterday include Royal Bank of Scotland, other high street banks, Prudential and BAT, the tobacco giant.

Tim Clarke, banking analyst at Panmure Gordon, said: "I would be surprised if a number of institutions were not currently looking into the possibility of a takeover bid."

"The announcement that

Woolwich is planning to convert to a bank, has raised a lot of opportunities for potential bidders. The society has effectively put itself in play by going public."

Mr Clarke said a potential suitor would find attractions in Woolwich's mortgage lending operation. Its 4 million savers and its South-East England bias.

John Stewart, operations director at Woolwich, said there had been some interest by other institutions, but no serious discussions had taken place.

He added: "We have a very good core business with consistent profit records over the years. We have been diversifying very successfully for years and all

our subsidiaries are in profit. Obviously, our board has a fiduciary duty to consider any offer but they would have to be prepared to pay a substantial premium."

A takeover bid would create an opportunity of a profit for Woolwich's savers, including those dubbed "carpetbaggers" for trying to speculate on its plans.

Any predator would have to

make an offer to all the society's members, not just those who joined it before the December 31 deadline, after which new members miss out on Woolwich's handout of shares.

Any potential bidder has 15 months, until the society's annual meeting in April next year, to

make a move. If members agree the demutualisation plans, a bid would become more difficult.

Rob Thomas, banking society analyst at UBS said: "Woolwich would have considered this possibility when deciding to make its move. I don't think there are any institutions out there with the resources or the contacts to do it."

Woolwich Prime Gold account holders will qualify for shares in the society's forthcoming flotation next year, contrary to a report in the *Independent* yesterday. Those who do not qualify are Current Account holders.

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Apple to cut up to 3,000 jobs

MATHEW HORSMAN
Media Editor

Beleaguered computer company Apple is expected to cut up to 3,000 jobs and write off up to \$80m of inventory, as the full extent of its profits collapse became apparent yesterday.

The company, which slashed pre-Christmas prices by up to 25 per cent in an effort to build sales volumes, admitted on Wednesday that its final quarter losses would be \$68m. The news sent the shares plunging by 6 per cent in New York, although the stock recovered.

According to informed sources, Apple's Americas operation will be split into three

divisions, covering software development, the educational market and mass consumer sales.

The group employs 13,000 world-wide, and had revenues last year of \$1.2bn.

The restructuring will be aimed at reversing a dramatic decline in the fortunes of one of the world's leading computer companies, with a 9 per cent market share.

Analysts said the poor performance indicated serious structural problems at the company, which had profits of \$855m just four years ago. Severe cost-cutting by competitors, particularly IBM, has forced the company to abandon its premium pricing policy. Pre-Christ-

mas prices were cut to just £750 for an entry-level Apple, from £1,000 previously. By contrast, IBM clone packages were just £500.

The price war will cut profit margins in the Christmas quarter to just 15 per cent, compared to as much as 50 per cent in 1990, when Apple managed to maintain high prices.

Cutting prices, which Apple last tried in 1993, goes against its traditional approach, which focussed on developing proprietary technology and maintaining margins through licensed distribution channels.

Despite the lower prices, Apple saw sales in the quarter climb by just 11 per cent like-for-like, compared to an in-

dustry-wide 25 per cent.

The downtown news came as 80,000 visitors attended the Macworld conference in San Francisco, normally a time when the company unveils new products. Instead, the company has maintained a low profile.

Analysts said yesterday that the future of Michael Spindler, the company's chief executive, was now in doubt. They suggested the company might have to retreat from the low-end of the market, and concentrate on niches where its user-friendly products have been popular, including publishing, which it dominates. Others suggested a takeover could be in the offing, with IBM and Sony leading the list.

The collapse of the net book agreement pushed revenues at Hodder Headline, the pioneer publisher, up 10 per cent in 1995 to just under \$90m (£58m).

writes Mathew Horsman.

According to unaudited figures, sales recovered strongly in the fourth quarter, following disappointing sales in the summer. The company, which left the NBA in 1994, nearly a year before the minimum price maintenance accord collapsed, said that 1996 has started strongly, fuelled by January sales at bookshops.

"Not all our sales growth came from the end of the NBA," Tim Hely Hutchinson, said last night. "But it is cer-

tainly better now that all book-sellers and publishers are on the same side of the fence."

He added that the company was exploring new ways of growing volumes, including giving booksellers higher discounts provided they were willing to accept firm sales of inventory. In some cases, booksellers report, publishers are willing to provide trade discounts of as much as 60 per cent compared to the more normal 40 per cent of the NBA era.

Mr Hely Hutchinson said his publishing group, which includes the Hodder & Stoughton imprint, was also willing to provide sharp discounts in order to promote new authors.

Hodder sees sales grow after collapse of NBA

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Future's still cloudy for Orange float

Hutchinson Whampoa denied reports that its Orange mobile telephone offset would go public in March. The company said no decision had yet been made. The board was still studying details of the plan, she said, although Kleinwort Benson and Goldman Sachs have been taken on as "potential float co-ordinators".

COMPANY RESULTS

Turnover £ Pre-tax £ EPS Dividend

Davidson Holdings (F) 322m (131m) 3.5m (



COMMENT

'Back in the days of rampant corporatism and daily government interference in business, when ministers would raise gas prices to massage the PSBR and lower them again to win election, this would not have looked out of place'

When the customer must not be asked to pay

Headline: "Taxpayers and customers to bail out British Gas over £40bn of North Sea contracts." **Sub head:** "Long-term supply contracts likely to cost the company enormous losses in today's oversupplied energy markets."

Er ... hold on a minute. Is this a time warp or what? Back in the age of nationalised industries, rampant corporatism and daily government interference in business, when ministers would raise gas prices to massage the PSBR and lower them again to win election, it would not have looked out of place. But today? Could this be real for in post-Thatcherite 1996, 10 years after British Gas was abandoned through privatisation to the rigours and disciplines of the market?

The truth, it seems, is that bailing out British Gas has become a very live issue indeed, though the idea of a taxpayer and customer bail-out is for the time being only wishful thinking by British Gas, the result of an internal study and not yet put to the Government.

In the original privatisation prospectus, shareholders were told they were buying into a 25-year monopoly, with competition to be allowed only in the market for large businesses. Indeed, the prospectus said the monopoly could only be terminated with at least 10 years' notice by the secretary of state for trade and industry.

In such circumstances, British Gas managers, who were unreconstructed state

industry apparatus, saw no undue risk in agreeing the 15- to 20-year take-or-pay supply contracts that are the source of its present troubles. These stipulated that the company must pay each year for a certain volume of gas, whether or not it took delivery. Though 55 per cent of the contracts were agreed before 1986, the company went on buying, and the last three take-or-pay contracts were signed after 1991.

The argument for a bail-out is quite simple; the Government, the Monopolies Commission, the Office of Fair Trading and the gas regulator changed the rules progressively between 1988 and 1993 to introduce greater competition. As a result, British Gas was faced with a falling market share which turned the take-or-pay contracts into a nightmare — an enormous liability because it could not sell enough gas to take all the contracted supplies. Worse still, open market gas prices also fell sharply, allowing new competitors to undercut by a wide margin.

Given that this débâcle was a result of government action, British Gas argues, why should shareholders bear all the pain? This is as clear a case of false prospectus as they come. Instead of 10 years' notice, British Gas was given little more than two years' warning of the pilot scheme for the introduction of competition in the domestic market, which is to begin in the South-west this spring.

But, like much in the gas business, these

claims should not be taken at face value. What changed after privatisation was the regulatory framework, and that happened because it was gradually realised that too little had been done to introduce competition into the industry.

The prospectus made perfectly clear that British Gas was subject to a regulator — and at the time of the sale the financial risk of arbitrary actions by Ofgas was at the forefront of the debate in the City. Indeed, the prospectus spell out the penalty for disobeying the regulator or ignoring the competition authorities, which was draconian — the loss of the monopoly.

In the electricity and water privatisations, regulatory risk has proved far less severe than investors thought at the time of privatisation, and enormous profits have been made. But with gas, and arguably telecommunications, it is considerably worse, and the shares have performed relatively badly. Indeed, the gas share price trend over the years shows how early the City grasped the scale of the risk.

The idea of roping taxpayers and consumers into a rescue plan for gas, simply because there was more interference from the regulator than expected, is a case of "heads I win, tails you lose" and is not acceptable. This is a matter between British Gas and its suppliers; the Government's role should be as a referee and no more.

And if it wants to get its offshore sup-

pliers to the negotiating table, it had better be a lot clearer about its own objectives. In particular, it must tell them whether any savings would be passed on to consumers. They are hardly likely to negotiate if they suspect the savings will be used to intensify competition from British Gas in exploration and production.

Will fur start to fly at the Exchange?

Nice document, shame about the timing. Had the Stock Exchange the nous to ask the market some while ago what sort of share dealing innovations it actually wants, much grief could have been spared. It might not have saved Michael Lawrence's job as chief executive, for there were so many disagreements that finally led to the cup of bile running over last week. But it would have spared the City unnecessary embarrassment as the Exchange lurches pell-mell from one *faux pas* to another, mostly connected with its clumsy efforts to push ahead with a share dealing revolution without any clear idea of the hacking for its plan.

There was always plenty of evidence that big institutions wanted to see an order-driven facility for the big FTSE stocks because they know it will cut their dealing costs. They are certainly not interested in helping the market-making middlemen improve their livelihoods any more than absolutely necessary. As one of Britain's

biggest institutional investors put it: "Clearly what the market-makers are interested in is the dealing system which maximises their p & l. For the investment community, we want that p & l to be as small as possible."

Three years ago there is no doubt the big market-makers would have dismissed out of hand an order-driven alternative. But already by last year their position was fast becoming more nuanced. Knowing the options on offer, the Stock Exchange should already then have found out what the market, and that means institutions, securities houses, big corporate lenders and small investors, favoured. It is only common sense to proceed with radical reforms on the basis of clear backing, rather than telling the market what you think is best and then hoping it finds support. If the consultation had shown broad support for the order-driven option, the market-makers would have adjusted to that. They may be powerful, but they cannot defy their clients.

The market-makers know they are heading for big changes. There will be fewer of them, and order-driven dealing will place a premium on distribution to off-load risk, along with a small number of high-powered block traders. Most importantly, the coming months will reopen the thorny debate about market-making privileges and how they fit into a new system. That should see some fur flying.

Fears grow of Gas dividend cut

MARY FAGAN
Industrial Correspondent

Fears are growing in the financial community that British Gas may cut its 1996 interim dividend because of costly long-term contracts with North Sea producers which are forcing the company to buy billions of pounds worth of gas it cannot sell.

Producers are resisting attempts by British Gas to renegotiate the contracts in spite of calls from the Government to resolve the issue. British Gas is also considering a range of controversial solutions, such as the offloading of some expensive contracts to new suppliers in the domestic market, or massive bank loans which would be partly repaid by the rest of the industry. But it stresses that nothing like this could be done without the support of ministers.

One City analyst said: "If they fail to make progress on the long-term contracts during the spring, I think they will cut the interim dividend. I know this fear is shared by several institutional investors and I see no will-

ingness on the part of producers to help sort things out."

According to another analyst: "Institutions are dead scared they will cut the dividend. Other than the dividend, why would they be in British Gas at the moment?"

In November British Gas announced an historic loss of £181m in the third quarter after

£83m in provisions related to the long-term contracts. The company also said it would be forced to make a £520m pre-payment in the final quarter for gas not used.

Richard Giordano, the chairman, called on the Government to help the company renegotiate these "take or pay" contracts, the effect of which was

impossible to quantify. He said that the situation would be exacerbated by the introduction of domestic competition in April.

The row escalated this week when the Government confirmed it may consider a levy on British Gas's rivals to help offset the cost of the "take or pay" deals. British Gas has argued that the contracts were signed

when it was a monopoly and could be sure of selling the gas. It believes that because the Government decided to end the monopoly, it should help to find a solution to the problem.

The Department of Trade and Industry may allow for the levy through a provision in new licences for rival suppliers which need to use British Gas pipes. But a spokeswoman said that no decision had been taken. Should it be included, it would be as "an insurance policy" in case the industry failed to solve its own problems and would not necessarily mean that a levy would be introduced.

The Gas Consumers' Council has attacked proposals for a levy on the grounds that the consumer would ultimately pay, Ian Powe, GCC director, said: "There are public issues at stake here. Whoever is responsible for the situation it is not the consumer and at this stage we must resist attempts to make customers pay." The council also wants the Government to forgive £170m in North Sea levies which British Gas pays each year.

Analysts believe it is prepared to pay around £156m — slightly above the £150m book value of the business. Persimmon may also assume some of the housebuilding subsidiary's debts.

City observers yesterday noted the close relationship between Trafalgar House and Persimmon. Simon Keswick, Trafalgar's chairman, is known to be friendly with Persimmon's chairman Duncan Davidson.

Beazer cries 'foul' over Trafalgar's Ideal sale

DAVID HELLIER

The fight for Ideal Homes looked set to escalate last night. Beazer Homes, one of Britain's biggest housebuilders claims it has been shut out of the bidding by Ideal's owners, Trafalgar House and is considering writing to its shareholders in an attempt to block the deal.

Trafalgar's favoured buyer for Ideal is Persimmon, which has been granted a period of exclusivity by Trafalgar House to put together an offer for the business.

Analysts believe it is prepared to pay around £156m — slightly above the £150m book value of the business. Persimmon may also assume some of the housebuilding subsidiary's debts.

City analysts say Beazer may be prepared to pay between £160 and 170m for the Ideal Homes business, and a Beazer spokeswoman said this figure was "not unrealistic".

Trafalgar House has already said that any offer by Persimmon would be put before shareholders at an extraordinary

general meeting. A spokesman said that the agreement with Persimmon offers a "highly satisfactory outcome" for the group.

"A number of approaches for the Ideal Homes business were made and all were considered very carefully. But the Persimmon deal was viewed as the best way forward for Trafalgar House."

Trafalgar needs a sale to reduce its borrowings — but its beleaguered shareholders will be hoping that it gets the highest price possible for a division which contributes a sizeable part of the group's UK profits.

Housebuilding was the most profitable division for Trafalgar and made profits of £28.4m last year, of which the Ideal Homes subsidiary contributed £19m.

A successful purchase for Persimmon would make it one of the country's leading housebuilders but it will need to have a share issue to raise money for the deal.



Richard Giordano: Wants the Government to help in solving the row
Photograph: FT

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

Edited by TOM STEVENSON

The world turned upside down

When a company is in the business of selling unit trusts, it has a vested interest in whipping up the enthusiasm of audiences at its presentations for the markets and sectors it has positions in. Even knowing that, however, nothing can quite prepare the innocent financial adviser for the evangelical onslaught of a GT Global sales pitch.

Behind the tub-thumping drama, however, yesterday's pitch to London's financial community, the latest stop on a round-Britain roadshow, threw up a torrent of fascinating ideas for investors, one of the more thought-provoking of which was the proposition that the relationship between equities and gilts has shifted, if not permanently then for the foreseeable future.

Inflation has shaped the investment landscape for so long now that it is hard to imagine a world where real assets such as houses and equities (that have a claim on the real assets of companies) do not sharply outperform paper ones such as bonds (gilts) and, particularly, cash.

Since 1972 equities have on average increased in capital value by 1 per cent more than the rate of inflation, maintaining the real value of investments and then some. Gilts by contrast have slumped in real terms, losing 90 per cent of their value in inflation-adjusted terms.

Since the beginning of 1990, however, that familiar picture has been overturned. Over the past five years, gilts have marginally outperformed equities (on a total return basis, which includes dividends). The effect has not been confined to the UK either — if anything the comparison is even more striking on a global basis.

Why should this be so? The answer appears to lie in the impact of inflation on the returns of different assets. In the 10 years from 1975 to 1985, inflation averaged 12 per cent a year and equities out-

performed gilts by 13 per cent a year. During the following 10 years, however, inflation was reined in to just 5 per cent a year on average and the outperformance was reduced to just 4 per cent. If GT is right and inflation ends the year at just 1.5 per cent (admittedly a tall order), gilts are likely to continue to be a relatively attractive investment for the first extended period in decades.

But don't write off equities. As Bob Farrell, Merrill Lynch's senior investment adviser in New York, pointed out earlier this week, demographic changes in the US have created one of the most unexpected phenomena of the 1990s. In the past 10 years, equities have increased from 16 per cent of total household assets to 32 per cent, a shift that has been one of the largest drivers of the Dow's current bull run and especially of the share prices of US stockbrokers such as Merrill Lynch itself and Charles Schwab, the discount brokerage which last year took over our own ShareLink.

The reason for the increasing popularity of shares seems to be the US's age profile. As the chart below shows, equity holdings appear to track the percentage of the workforce over the age of 35. In other words, older workers, fretting about retirement and the inadequacy of state provision for the elderly have a tendency to put more of their money into long-term savings plans, mainly equities.

The UK of course is not the US but it seems plausible that the same forces will drive equity holdings here up from the 6 per cent of household assets they currently represent closer to the 18 per cent they reached in the late 1950s.

That will be good news for stock markets as a whole. Specifically, it will be good news over the next few years for the companies whose stock in trade is handing other people's money. A portfolio of financial companies such as

Mercury Asset Management, M&G, King & Shaxson (which owns the broker Greig Middleton and Allied Provincial), BWD and Lloyds Ahkey Life could be very rewarding for the remainder of the decade.

Argos catches Nineties mood

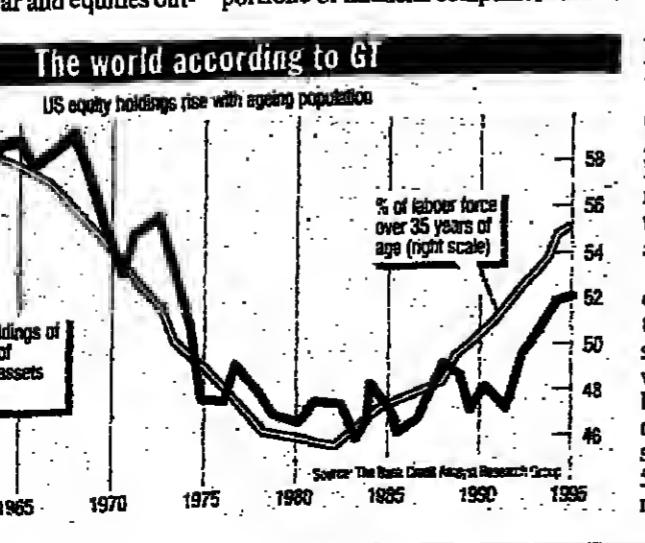
Argos, the catalogue retailer, has been true to its recent excellent form over the crucial Christmas selling period. Trading figures out yesterday showing a 14 per cent rise in sales for the five weeks ahead of the festive season have translated into an underlying increase of 3 per cent on like-for-like store space. Even if not up with the double-figure growth recorded by Dixons and Carpetright, these are impressive figures, particularly after strong Christmas performances in both 1993 and 1994.

But Argos has been such a steady performer that yesterday's announcement surprised no one. Profits forecasts for the full year are therefore only being edged up or held at around £130m for last year, which would represent a 20 per cent increase on 1994.

The company's formula of no-frills, pay for money retaining just off the high street has really caught the mood of the cost-conscious Nineties. After a blip at the beginning of the decade, when profits slumped to £52.9m, Argos has grown steadily. And the formula still has a way to go before it reaches the whole country. The 370-strong chain of traditional stores has the potential to reach close to 500, the company believes, while it reckons it could more than double the number of superstores to between 100 and 120. It has also seen off the threat from discount clubs like CostCo and Warehouse Club and with low rental and labour costs well below high street rivals, it is well placed to keep them at bay.

The main threat comes from the £200m cash which is currently burning a hole in Argos's balance sheet. The company is keen to diversify, but shareholders will remember the previous venture into furniture retailing, Chesterman, which left a £12.5m hole in 1992's figures.

First Stop, a discount format currently



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ATHLETICS: Britain's leading lady is taking the first tentative steps back on track after a year in which she has endured the pain of serious injury as well as losing her world 400 metres hurdles record. **Mike Rowbottom** reports

Adversity brings maturity for Gunnell

A single figure lags the track at Crawley Stadium, accompanied by the sound of lorries on the bypass and the harsh cries of seagulls drawn inland by freezing weather as they wheel overhead.

A crow waddles across the infield. More lorries pass. The wind chill factor, as the afternoon gives way to evening, is around -12C. The figure embarks on another lap.

The fates which carried Sally Gunnell to Olympic, world, European and Commonwealth titles have brought her to this bleak place in an attempt to turn fortune's wheel full circle after a year-long plunge into injury which caused her to doubt whether she would compete again.

The bone-chilling wind bears a clear imperative: go home; get warm. But Gunnell sets her face against it. Atlanta calls, and she has promises to keep.

Britain's most successful female athlete of all time is quite different now to the giggly, occ-

'I was in tears every time I started to stride. I never thought I'd be in so much pain'

casionally gauche character who made her breakthrough at 400 metres hurdles in the Barcelona Olympics of 1992. The suffering of the last year, as much as the achievements of the previous three, have effected the change.

Gunnell's maturity has been well marked by Bruce Longden, who has coached her throughout her career. "I have seen it for some time," he said. "Last year made her realise a lot more about herself, the trials and tribulations of it all. She has always been a tough character, but I think it has made her even tougher. It's a case of 'been there, done that' for her. Now she's been seriously injured, and come back."

"Until she had her injury, everything had rolled along relatively smoothly for her. Suddenly she found a large buffer in her way and she has had to deal with it."

The buffer in question emerged around this time last year. It was not, as was first feared, an Achilles tendon injury, but a growth of a bone spur in her right heel which was diagnosed belatedly and removed surgically in August. Dealing with it, however, was not as simple an operation.

"First of all it was a matter of learning to walk again," Gunnell recalled. "It was real-



Sally Gunnell, who is ready to smile once more as she looks forward to the Olympics after the most excruciating 12 months of her career

Photograph: David Ashdown

ly weird to think that this person hobbles around was me."

Her situation was not without its lighter moments – she chuckled as she recalled the presentation for a sports bra which she gave while on crutches. "In a way I think it worked in my favour, but I had to laugh at myself."

But the laughter ceased in the autumn months after the crutches had been set aside. "That was the worst time for me," she said. "I had expected to come out and start running again straight away, but I seemed to be worse off. I thought, 'Eight months. For

Christ's sake, how long is this going to go on for?'

"I felt as if I'd been patient all summer and I was desperate to get on with it. I would have a good day, and I would think 'Yes! Then I would have a week when I would hurt again. I was in tears every time I started to stride. I never thought I'd be in so much pain."

For the first time in her life, Gunnell was in the disturbing territory which so many talented athletes have had to traverse. Roger Black could have told her about it. Derek Redmond could have told her

about it. Liz McColgan could have told her about it. But in the end it is a place you have to visit, and leave, alone.

The journey back has been long and fraught. Like any other athlete who has suffered serious injury, her outlook has altered. She runs where she can on grass to cushion the stress on her foot. And she has to make calculations about the relative softness of the tracks near her home outside Brighton.

The decision to train at Crawley, for instance, had been prompted by her feeling that the surface at Horsham stadium which she has used for years was becoming a bit hard. Even getting on to the windswept track at Crawley was not straightforward. Locked gates frustrated her first attempt to enter the stadium, and the path back to the sports centre's reception was cordoned off with a crazed superabundance of tape which suggested the work of Gordon Brittas.

Having gone the long way round to the main desk, Gunnell struggled to make her request for access heard above the screaming saws and echoing hammers of whatever ren-

ovation work was in progress. You could not help thinking that Gunnell's exotic French rival, Marie-José Pérec, would not be encountering similar local difficulties at the University of Irvine track in California.

Gunnell has had more than enough time to contemplate her chances of retaining the Olympic 400m hurdles title this summer. Pérec, Olympic and world 400m champion, finished her first full season of hurdling last year with a personal best of 53.21sec in only her sixth race – as compared with the world record of 52.74

which Gunnell set in winning the title.

Since then, of course, that record has been lowered by Gunnell's American friend Kim Batten who, pushed to the limit by her compatriot Tonja Buford, recorded 52.61 in last summer's World Championships at Gothenburg.

The effect upon Gunnell was immediate – as part of the BBC commentary team in Sweden, she had to interview Batten who, as she came off the track, "had so many questions I wanted to ask her, but I was also in shock," she recalled. "It was only later that night that I

had a moment, mentally taking in her trials of the last 12 months.

"I must admit," she said, "that last January I was on that fine line of being the finest I've ever been and..." She paused for a moment, mentally taking in her trials of the last 12 months. "As I look at it now," she went on, "I think this year off was meant to be. When you can't do something you love, you want it back badly." She paused for a moment, mentally taking in her trials of the last 12 months.

"If Olympic titles were awarded for desire and determination, Gunnell could already count on a second gold."

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HOW TO PLAY

Today we are playing the section of the card dated Saturday 13 January. Below are three sporting questions, each with three possible answers coded as A, B and C. Scratch off your answer to Question One, either A, B or C in the Q1 column then repeat for Q2 and Q3.

THE QUESTIONS

Q1 Which of the following is an ice hockey term referring to play being re-started?

- A: Face off
- B: Hit off
- C: Bully off

Q2 How many points does it take to win a single table tennis game, assuming scores are not level?

- A: 21
- B: 15
- C: 10

Q3 Which cricketer holds the record for the highest number of runs scored in a single Test innings?

- A: Graham Gooch
- B: Brian Lara
- C: Viv Richards

RULES

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THE INDEPENDENT

Unhell

REGAL TROPHY FINAL: Wigan look to a slick exponent of traditional hooking skills to oil the machine against St Helens

Reliability is Hall's hallmark

Dave Hadfield assesses a relatively unsung powerhouse whose skills are vital for more high-profile team-mates

Wigan's team will always include players considerably more eye-catching than Martin Hall, but there is an argument for nominating the hooker who plays against St Helens in the Regal Trophy final today as the glue that holds the whole thing together. The good news this week for both Hall and Wigan is that the glue is sticking with the club, at least for the first Super League season.

Hall had been due to join the Australian Rugby League when his current contract expires in June. However, in the first concession of its type, the ARL have decided to let him play out the season at Wigan.

It's what Wigan wanted and it's what I wanted and I'm delighted that the ARL have decided to let me carry on at Central Park for the time being," Hall said. "It's a weight off my mind, although I'm still looking forward to going to Australia in 1997."

It could simply be that the ARL are having trouble placing a specialist hooker who, unlike many other Wigan players, is not particularly well-known on the other side of the world. If clubs there were more fully aware of what he has to offer, the ARL attitude might not be so generous.

Like last week's semi-final against Leeds, for instance. There were top drawer contributions from high-profile players like Shaun Edwards and Gary Connolly, but the choice for man of the match – and a popular one at that – was Hall. Not only had he popped up with the first try, blowing open what had been for 20 minutes a tight contest, but his work-rate throughout had been a major strand in the way Wigan capitalised on that advantage.

Even when official recognition does not come his way, the Wigan coach, Gracie West, and team-mates like Edwards frequently go out of

their way to highlight his contribution: a team man, for whom glue is just one analogy, the oil in the engine being another. And yet Hall's position at Wigan has never been the most secure.

Originally signed from Rochdale Hornets almost exactly three years ago as an understudy to the then Great Britain hooker, Martin Dermott, Hall got his chance to establish himself in the first team because of the other Dermott's dreadful run of injuries. Even then, there were some, inside and outside the club, who harboured for Dermott's creative skills as almost an extra half-back, rather than Hall's more direct approach.

Dermott is now fully fit again and lurking ominously on the substitutes' bench, his breath on the back of Hall's neck. But that is Wigan for you; there is usually a tempting alternative waiting in the wings if your form dips below the excellent for a week or two. "There's always competition for places – you accept that," Hall said.

If he was the sort to suffer from insecurity, he would also have noted with concern that Wigan were instantly linked with the Halifax hooker, Paul Rowley, when he was put on the transfer list at £250,000 last month. Wigan were quick to stress that they were more than happy with their hooking situation, but the way the rumour mill immediately whirred into action underlined the inevitable lack of any long-term guarantees.

Hall comes from a subtly different school of hooking from the mercurial Rowley or today's opponent, Saints' Keiron Cunningham. Both of those players are capable of doing things that would have been unthinkable for hookers a decade ago, like going almost the length of the field for a solo try – as Cunningham did against Warrington on Sunday.



On the ball: Martin Hall, the Wigan hooker, demonstrates a safe pair of hands

Hall will not do that. But he will be there to support a half-break and keep a move flowing which it would otherwise die. He is often the one player to read a surprise thrust through a defence by Edwards or Henry Paul and the one who gets there to give him the options he needs.

Hall and Cunningham are not just opponents in club rugby, they also have what Hall calls "a friendly rivalry" for the hooker's shirt in the Welsh side. Not that there is anything very obviously Welsh about the Oldham-born Hall, who threw in his lot with Wales as part of the mass defection by the entire Wigan front row.

Hall kept Cunningham – eight years his junior – at bay during last autumn's World Cup. In the process, he showed that he can prosper at international level as well as on the big domestic occasion for Wigan.

Photograph: Neal Simpson

Green Bay carry hopes of traditionalists and neutrals

American football

MATT TENCH

It is not just the hopes of Wisconsin that the Green Bay Packers will carry with them into Texas Stadium tomorrow. For the sport's traditionalists, not to mention its sentimentalists, their appearance in the NFC Championship game gives what promises to be an enthralling encounter with the Dallas Cowboys a special poignancy.

In a sport, perhaps a nation, where change is a constant, such continuity is accorded a special reverence, and there will be no shortage of armchair enthusiasts

rooting for the green and yellow come kick-off time tomorrow.

Despite dominating the Thirties and the Sixties, the Packers' appearance in what is effectively a Super Bowl semi-final is a surprise. The smallest town to sustain a professional franchise, Green Bay has grown accustomed in the last two decades to seeing its team locked in the basement of the NFC Central.

Only in the last couple of years, under the daring stewardship of the head coach Mike

Holmgren, have the Packers and their fanatical fans been able to aspire to anything like their former glories. Holmgren, who was the offensive co-ordinator in San Francisco, brought the West Coast offence with him, and has successfully established it in the harsher climes of the Great Lakes.

The key to doing so has been the performances of Brett Favre. There was a time when Favre was regarded as a quarterback who could lose

you games. In the last couple of seasons he has been winning plenty of them.

Favre's devastating form this season presents the biggest threat to a Cowboy side that has a formidable recent record against the Pack, and has a better balanced attack which includes the phenomenal rushing skills of Emmitt Smith.

The Packers will be looking to their brilliant defensive end Reggie White to disrupt that offence, but his preparation for

the game has been overshadowed by far more serious events off the field.

White is the pastor of a church in Knoxville, Tennessee. On Monday it was burned to the ground, with racist slogans daubed on the hack door. "The only thing I'm upset about is maybe our police department is not taking this thing seriously enough," White said.

"It's time to stop sweeping this stuff under the rug. If we don't do something about these

groups, more people are going to die. I think until this country starts dealing strongly with these organisations that are doing things like this, we're going to continue to have these problems."

For White the game can only be a brutal distraction, but we can be sure that he will go into it with the words of one Green Bay legend ringing in his ears. "Winning isn't everything," said Vince Lombardi, the head coach of the Sixties dynasty. "It is the only thing."

Britain's Olympic warm-up

Hockey

BILL COLWILL

Great Britain put the finishing touches to their preparations for the Olympic qualifying tournament, which starts in Barcelona on Friday, with two games against Malaysia this weekend at Bisham Abbey.

The manager, David Whittle, was not worried yesterday that Malaysia, one of Britain's seven opponents in Barcelona, would be given a preview. He said: "We play them late in the tournament and they will have had plenty of time to watch us in Barcelona. They are a country desperate to get back into the top six in the world and will give us the tough opposition we need at this stage."

Whittle added: "We have no injury problems and now need to call on the excellent preparation we have been able to make during the past few weeks." Since coming together at the end of November Britain have played eight internationals, and apart from a draw against Argentina, they have won the remaining games, scoring 29 times in the process.

Malaysia, who progressed rapidly up the world rankings under their Australian coach, Jerry Walsh, in the lead-up to the Barcelona Olympics, finished three places behind Britain, in ninth, subsequently parting company with Walsh. Currently coached by the German Volker Kühn, they appear to be on the up and can be expected to give Britain the test they want. Their centre-forward, Shankar Ramu, has played for a couple of seasons for Camrock in the National League.

Britain seem likely to give an extended run to Soma Singh at half-left with the rest of the starting line-up looking settled. GREAT BRITAIN (Probable): G Mason (Goalie); J Wyer (Reading), J Hallis (Stourbridge), G Fotheringham (Harrow), Kalle Takke (Cannock); R Garcia (Prestwich), R Thompson (Brentwood), J Leadell (Teddington), N Thompson (Old Trafford), Substitutes: D Lockett (East Grinstead), C Gates (Harrow), J Shaw (Southgate).

Other sports

Football

Matches not on pools coupon; 3.0 unless stated

GM VAUGHAN CONFERENCE

ATLANTIC v St Helens

Bath City v Bedford

Dagenham & Redbridge

Gateshead v Padiham

Hednesford v Northwich

Kettering v Dover

Kidderminster v Winclefield

Morescombe v Woking

Runcorn v Buxton

Stevenson v Hartlepool

Welling v Shifnal

Wigan v St Helens

Wigan v Warrington

Wigan v

sport

Hillier did not suggest, incidentally, that he thought the bag was a gift and, in any case, he intended to give it back at a later date

One piece of football news was hurried this week under the pile of old baggage which surrounded Terry Venables' decision to hang up his England tracksuit. David Hillier, the Arsenal midfield player, admitted in court that he had stolen a briefcase belonging to a Danish businessman.

It seems that on their return from a holiday, Hillier, along with Wayne Burnett of Bolton Wanderers, spotted the case apparently abandoned in a bus stop at Gatwick Airport and decided to liberate it. In fact, its owner had merely left it there while he went to retrieve his car.

The case contained £3,000-worth of clothes and computer equipment, which might be considered a disappointingly small haul compared in the amounts other former Arsenal employees have found in bags left lying around by Scandina-

vian businessmen. Hillier did not suggest, incidentally, that he thought the bag was a gift and that, in any case, he intended to give it back at a later date.

Instead, the player threw himself at the magistrate's mercy, saying that he was distraught at his stupidity and that his form had dipped to such a degree since the incident, what with all the guilt and worrying, that he was now on the transfer list. The magistrate accepted his plea, although a closer observer of the game would have pointed out that it wasn't necessarily the crime: anybody's form would suffer if they were obliged to share the midfield with John Jensen and Martin Keown.

And a more astute legal process might have asked questions about the Arsenal youth system which helped develop Hillier's talent. He

is a graduate of an operation which also produced Ray "Pizza" Parlour, who got into trouble in Hong Kong after a Dennis Wise-style altercation with a taxi driver. There is also Paul Merson, whose all-round personal problems led to a near-breakdown and Kevin Dennis, who never made it into the first team, not so much because he wasn't talented but because in September 1993 he was sentenced to 30 months for manslaughter.

At Dennis's initial hearing, the north London club, showing admirable loyalty to an employee, asked the magistrate if the case could be brought forward as they had a car waiting outside to take the player down to a reserve match. And we must not forget the Arsenal youth system's most decorated old boy, Tony Adams, who served 56 days

Jim White



ON SATURDAY

a four-month sentence for drink-driving in December 1990. An intriguing roll-call.

Luckily for Hillier, the magistrate decided not to delve too closely and simply to fine him £750. Thus the player missed the chance to join

football's most exclusive squad: those who have served time. Bring them together, and the British Lions XI would make quite a handy team.

The spine would have been constructed from the Sheffield Wednesday trio, Peter Swan, Tony Kay and David "Bronco" Layne, jailed for four months in 1965 for match-fixing. They might be getting on a bit now, but once would have been handy for helping the lads secure a result.

Alongside them would be yet another product of the marble halls of Highbury, Peter Storey, a double-winner with the Gunners and a double time-server too: he was given two years in 1980 for plotting to counterfeit gold half-sovereigns and then 28 days in 1990 for smuggling pornographic videos.

Ricky Otto of Birmingham (three years for robbery in 1987) and Jamie Lawrence of Doncaster (26 months for robbery in 1992) might have been useful additions to the team when it required some kit in a hurry, and endless injections of enthusiasm could be provided by Mickey Thomas, the evergreen Wrexham winger who was given 18 months in 1993 for passing forged banknotes (although it might be advisable to check his match fee carefully before accepting it).

Judging by the way in which the leading contenders are running away from it as if from a man possessed by a terminal case of halitosis, if the magistrate had really wanted to punish the player he would have given him the sentence everyone in football fears: the job of England manager.

Seles relishes belated return

John Roberts looks at the prospects of a former tennis champion recapturing her title when the Australian Open gets under way in Melbourne on Monday

Two new show courts are the latest embellishments, along with fluorescent tennis balls. Some of the female players would like to tell the organisers where to shove them, equal prize-money having been abandoned except in the case of the singles champions. Otherwise the place remains largely as Monica Seles remembers it from her last visit in 1993.

Having suffered a traumatic experience in the meantime, however, Seles could be forgiven for not recollecting a speech made on the court by the Channel 7 announcer, Bruce McAvaney, after she had defeated Steffi Graf, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2, to win the title for the third consecutive year. "Well, this might not make much sense to Monica," McAvaney said, "but we used to have a thoroughbred named Phar Lap and he had a very big heart and so does Monica Seles. She turned 21 today. 21 straight victories here at Flinders Park; again the champion." But how was he to know that the analogy he drew between Seles and the folk hero of the antipodean turf would become so frighteningly apt?

Phar Lap (Maori for Red Lightning) was shot at from a moving car days before winning the Melbourne Cup in 1930, and traces of arsenic were found in the chestnut gelding's body after he died mysteriously in California in April 1932, two weeks after winning a race in Mexico.

Three months after Seles left Flinders Park in 1993, the 19-year-old was stabbed in the back by a Graf obsessive, Gunnar

match in 1992, Seles defeating Fernandez in straight sets in the final, but the German won the title for a fourth time in 1994, when counselling had supplanted tennis on Seles's agenda.

A year ago, the fact that the women's singles would be de-valued by the absence of both the injured Graf and the rehabilitating Seles was offset to a degree by media preoccupation with Andre Agassi, who finally arrived and made a winning debut at the championships.

The guarantee of a new women's champion, someone who would break the Graf-Seles monopoly which had existed since the tournament moved to the rubberised concrete of Flinders Park from the lawns of Kooyong in 1988, only became a novelty when the victor turned out to be Mary Pierce and not Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, the strong favourite.

Pierce, who had been sub-

jected to a difficult upbringing by a father who was disruptive both on and off the court, grasped her opportunity. The tall blonde dominated the final with her potent groundstrokes, defeating Sanchez Vicario in straight sets.

Seles is wary of the situation. "I think Mary Pierce will be very tough because of how well she did last year," she said, perhaps applying the logic that a champion's confidence is replenished on returning to the scene of a triumph.

The fact is that Pierce, who marks her 21st birthday on the opening day of the tournament, has provided scant evidence to suggest that her game has improved since that initial Grand Slam success. At the

French Open, where she caused a sensation in 1994 by over-

whelming Graf to reach the final, Pierce lost a four-round match to Iva Majoli of Croatia in straight sets.

That prompted Pierce's coach, Nick Bollettieri, to send her to the Mayo Clinic to check if her disappointing performances were related to a series of illnesses and injuries which had affected her during the spring (a kidney infection and strains to the shoulder, arm and groin). She passed a rigorous physical examination.



Mary Pierce (left), last year's Australian Open winner, has a motivated Monica Seles (right) to contend with this year



Photographs: Reuter/AP

Rusedski faces Becker

Greg Rusedski is braced for a battle of the big hitters in the first round of the Australian Open after he was paired with Boris Becker in yesterday's draw. Another Briton, Tim Henman, also faces a stiff first-round test against Peter Korda, of the Czech Republic.

Rusedski, who claims to be the fastest serve in the world, will know that when he meets the world No 3 at Melbourne's Flinders Park next week he will have to upset the odds, after bookmakers installed Becker as 10-1 joint third favourite.

However, Rusedski is enjoying a run of good form, having made it into yesterday's semi-finals of the Peters International tournament in Sydney, where he lost to Todd Martin.

Pete Sampras, the world No 1, meets Australia's Richard

Froberg in the first round – and could face an even bigger threat in the third round in the form of Mark Philippoussis.

Andre Agassi, who beat Sampras in the final last year, has a much easier path to help him back to fitness after a three-month lay-off caused by an injured chest muscle. He opens against a qualifier and is then scheduled to face his fellow American Vince Spadea.

Monica Seles was installed as the pre-draw favourite in the absence of the injured Steffi Graf. She starts against a qualifier and should ease through to the semi-finals, where she is seeded to meet Arantxa Sanchez Vicario.

The defending champion, Mary Pierce, is in the same quarter as Kimiko Date, and is seeded to meet the No 2, Conchita Martinez, in the semi-finals.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

■ We would have a World Cup qualifying game around October or November and I would be in court for several weeks. Terry Venables explains why he resigned as England football coach.

■ Terry's decision had nothing to do with what is being written in the papers – they are comics anyway. Fred Venables, the coach's father.

■ I'm interested in managing nobody but Newcastle United. Kevin Keegan rules himself out of the England running.

■ I have 18 months left of my contract and I won't be moving while I'm under that contract. As does Bryan Robson.

■ You've hit a few in your time. Let's finish it in the tunnel. What Terry McDermott is alleged to have said to Bruce Rioch at Highbury.

■ I'm feeling battered and bruised and more in need of recuperation

than my players. Howard Wilkinson, Leeds manager, after their 4-2 FA Cup win at Derby.

■ Sunderland came here to play a cup tie but we treated it just like a normal game. Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson forgets to look at his future fist.

■ These are troubled times. Warrington coach, Clive Griffiths, reflects on their 54-14 rugby league defeat by Hull KR.

■ I'm interested in managing nobody but Newcastle United. Kevin Keegan rules himself out of the England running.

■ I have a World Cup qualifying game around October or November and I would be in court for several weeks. Terry Venables explains why he resigned as England football coach.

■ We just had a few in our time. Let's finish it in the tunnel. What Terry McDermott is alleged to have said to Bruce Rioch at Highbury.

■ I'm feeling battered and bruised and more in need of recuperation

NEWCASTLE

HYPERION

12.40 Highbank, 1.10 Daily Boy, 1.45 The Bud Club, 2.20 Dominic, 2.55 Addington Boy, 3.25 Winzum, 3.55 Jalcanto

GOING: Good. A few march of the Aces, fair march of the Bud Club.

WINNERS IN LAST SEVEN DATES: None.

LONG-DISTANCE RUNNERS: Romsey Creek (1-16) travels 30 miles from G & B Holdings's Fylde stable in Hampshire.

GRASS: 2-2. SHOVELER COND., JOCKEYS' SELLING

1. 212PF DAY SOUND (20) P/Golden 5-6m 2-0m 2m 6f

2. 042021 BARKER (20) A Harrison 9-10 12-13

3. 022051 ANTHONY RELAY (20) C Parker 5-11 6-7

4. 495003 ROMSEY CREEK (20) P/Macrae 4-5 6-7

5. 460403 CEDRIC CELIBON (20) M/Petrey 5-11 6-7

6. 002000 NORTHERN STARS (20) P/Darby 5-11 6-7

7. 002000 ROMSEY CREEK (20) P/Macrae 5-11 6-7

8. 002000 ROMSEY CREEK (20) P/Macrae 5-11 6-7

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40. 002000 ROMSEY CREEK (20)

Cavalier has odds and attitude on his side

GREG WOOD

Victor Chandler and Ladbrokes are both bookmakers, but this afternoon Britain's punters get their annual chance to compare two very different approaches to the business of laying odds. The feature race in Britain is the Victor Chandler Chase at Ascot, fiercely competitive yet offering backers a fair crack of the whip. In Ireland, by contrast, the 10th running of the Ladbroke Hurdle is once again a hopeless race giving punters a little chance of success as possible.

Chandler, of course, is a bookie of the old school, shouting the odds on the rails and always prepared to back his own judgement by laying an extra point about a horse he does not fancy. Not that he will have any difficulty finding backers for all but a couple of the runners in his race this afternoon. As ever, it has attracted a high-quality field, but this year's renewal is one of the most competitive yet, with established performers from the top such as Egypt Mill Prince taking on upwardly mobile chasers like Front Street and Martin's Lamp.

Egypt Mill Prince has probably been attempting the impossible on his last two outings, when second both to Dublin Flyer in the Mackeson Gold Cup and then to Lonesome

Glory, the best chaser in America, who for some reason was playing like a struggling novice for his British chasing debut. Jenny Pitman's runner is painfully vulnerable to an improving, unexposed rival with a low weight, however, and to

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Seasonal Splendour
(Ascot 1.00)
NB: Trail Boss
(Warwick 12.55)

day's contest has a long list of candidates.

There is no shortage either of form lines to connect them, but firm conclusions are rather harder to come by. Front Street, three times a winner this season, beat Martin's Lamp four weeks ago but is now 6lb worse off for

four lengths. Front Street has also beaten Gales Cavalier, who in turn has finished second to Kibret and, last season, to Dancing Paddy. Add in the ever-changing burdens involved and not one of those results is guaranteed to be repeated.

Confused? You should be. One obvious point, though, is that with so many credible winners, there can be no value in a short price about Front Street or, in particular, Martin's Lamp, who may contract still further this morning following Adrian Maguire's double at Ascot yesterday. In a difficult race, preference must be for a runner of longer odds, and while Dancing Paddy is too long at 14-1, Gales Cavalier (2.10) at 10-1 is the pick of the prices.

That nice Mr Chandler also lends his support to the open-

ing novice hurdle, another fascinating contest with any number of possible winners. This trip is far from certain to suit either Tennessee Twist or Wisley Wonder and BUTTERCUP JOE (nap 1.00) and Adrian Maguire are the pair to be on. The same jockey has every chance of recording a swift double on Seven of Diamonds (1.35).

The 23-runner contest at Leopardstown should be avoided – four of the last six winners have started at 20-1 or greater. Those who cannot resist should consider both the poor record of British challengers – which this year is headed by the Simon Dow-trained, Richard Dunwoody-cidden Chief's Song – and the success of Paddy Mullins and Arthur Moore. Mullins' Gambolling Dog has clearly been laid out for the race, but then so have most of the others.

At Warwick, As De Cares, one of the best chasers in France, tackles British fences for the first time following his somewhat bizarre appearance in the Ifforth Hurdle at Sandown seven days ago. Today's trip and company will be much more to his liking – the Grand National is his principal target. A safe round of jumping is the most we can expect from Moorcroft Boy, racing today for the first time since a near-fatal fall at Aintree in November 1994.



Simon Dow holds high hopes for Chief's Song, who has a stiff task in today's Ladbroke

Photograph: Peter Jay

ASCOT

1.00 VICTOR CHANDLER NOVICE HURDLE (CLASS B) £2,500 added 2m 4f £8,571

1 53-2111 LE JOURNAL (F) (9) David S Lovell / J Bradley 5 1.18 ... G McCourt

2 2132-22 MONTROSE (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker / R Alcock 6 11.8 ... G McCourt

3 42-21 TENNESSEE TWIST (F) (9) (2d) Andrew International Ltd Mrs P. H. 6 11.8 ... W Harrold

4 00-4111 WISLEY WONDER (F) (9) (2d) Paul Parmentier 6 11.8 ... G McCourt

5 30-2122 BUTTERCUP JOE (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker / R Alcock 6 11.8 ... G McCourt

6 53-2142 SWEETHEART (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker / R Alcock 6 11.8 ... G McCourt

7 11-1222 SHERIFF (F) (9) (2d) Christopher P. Bowes / Hills 5 11.4 ... D Galagher

8 30-040 ANNUAL (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker / R Alcock 6 11.0 ... D McCourt

9 00-038 ALIAS (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker / R Alcock 6 11.0 ... D McCourt

10 00-039 ARTHUR (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker / R Alcock 6 11.0 ... D McCourt

11 00-040 MILLIE POOTER (USA) (9) (2d) Ian Barlow / M Barlow 7 11.0 ... A Terry

12 00-041 TIGER (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker / R Alcock 6 11.0 ... D McCourt

13 U-334 LADS (F) (9) (2d) Ian Barlow 7 11.0 ... D McCourt

14 00-042 GOOD CALL (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker 7 11.0 ... D McCourt

15 0-5544 STYLISH (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker 7 11.0 ... D McCourt

16 0-0 SWALLOWS FOOL (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker 7 11.0 ... A McCoy

17 0-0 SEVEN OF DIAMONDS (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker 7 11.0 ... D McCourt

18 33-1 SEASONAL SPLENDOUR (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker 7 11.0 ... D McCourt

19 0-0 CYPRIAN QUEEN (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker 7 11.0 ... D McCourt

20 2 MEANT TO BE (F) (9) (2d) Alan Walker 7 11.0 ... D McCourt

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144 00-166 REPEAT THE DOSE

SPORT

£40,000 to be won

See Page 22

'I never thought I'd be in so much pain'
The return of Sally Gunnell

22

Uefa ban stuns Spurs and Wimbledon**Football**

PHIL SHAW

Tottenham Hotspur and Wimbledon, staggered by yesterday's one-season ban from Europe for failing to enter into the spirit of last summer's Intertoto Cup, will have the backing of the Football Association and the Premier League in their appeal to European football's governing body, Uefa.

The suspension - the third

punishment imposed by Uefa in response to the under-strength teams fielded by Spurs and Wimbledon - will be active for five years. If either qualifies for any European competition within that period, they will not be allowed to enter.

After a hastily convened meeting with FA officials, Sam Hammam, Wimbledon's owner, and Peter Barnes, the Spurs' secretary, announced their intention to fight the ban. Both Hammam and Spurs' chair-

man, Alan Sugar, reacted with incredulity rather than anger to the Uefa's bolt from the blue, each suggesting it must be the result of a misunderstanding.

An FA spokesman pledged legal and moral backing for Spurs and Wimbledon, although he argued that Lancaster Gate could not be blamed. "We can't be held responsible for what Uefa has decided to do," he said. Rick Parry, the Premier League's chief executive, offered "full support" to the clubs.

According to Sugar, Spurs had only entered the Intertoto "by way of a favour" to the FA and Premier League. They understand they had permission from the FA to field sides comprising loan players and reserves in the games, which were staged in June and July when most of their first-team squad were on holiday. With the pitch at White Hart Lane being reseeded, they were also allowed to play at Brighton.

"There must be a major mis-

understanding and I'm sure it'll be cleared up very shortly," Sugar said last night. He said the FA's sanction was confirmed in writing and that Spurs received an assurance from Uefa by phone that "nothing would happen if we proceeded on that basis".

He added: "Therefore the wires have been crossed somewhere and I'm sure it will be resolved. I'm sure the FA and Premier League will back up exactly what I have said. All the other chairmen know this was the

case as it was agreed at a Premier League meeting at which Rick Parry and Graham Kelly (the FA chief executive) were present."

Wimbledon also played at Brighton with a team reinforced by "outsiders". Hammam said: "I'm sure there's a misunderstanding. We went into the Intertoto not because of money but because of a threat that all English clubs would be banned from Europe if we didn't. We were proud to do that at the time."

Hammam was "optimistic" that the "honourable and able people in Uefa" would listen sympathetically to their appeal. This isn't a case for Wimbledon to deal with. It is for the whole of English football to be united." Uefa had already withheld the financial reward the two clubs were due for entering the Intertoto. Then last month it reduced from four to three the number of places for English clubs in next season's Uefa Cup because of the "poor atti-

tude" of Spurs and Wimbledon. "We knew Uefa were unhappy," an FA spokesman said. "They felt the clubs hadn't entered into the spirit of the competition." Spurs' captain, Gary Mabbutt, was "devastated" by the ban. Wimbledon twice missed out on Europe because of the ban that followed the Heysel disaster. The third English entrant, Sheffield Wednesday, escaped with a Uefa reprimand, having been second in their section.

Football, page 26

Francis is latest to snub England job

GUY HODGSON

The pool of talent the Football Association will draw from to appoint a successor to Terry Venables as England coach took on the overflowing abundance of a Yorkshire Water reservoir yesterday when two more candidates withdrew from consideration.

Gerry Francis, a former England captain and now manager of Tottenham Hotspur, said his immediate future lay in club

football and implored the FA to press Venables to change his mind. Chelsea's Glenn Hoddle, meanwhile, joined Kevin Keegan, Bryan Robson, Joe Royle and Ray Wilkins in saying he was not interested in the job.

Francis, who slipped from the bookies' favourite to second in the running, made his statement in response to what he described as "intense media speculation". It was also delivered before the surprise announcement that Spurs have been sus-

pended for a year from European competition by Uefa.

"Although my agreement with Tottenham expires this summer," he said, "at the present time I am of the same opinion as I was two years ago, when I was interviewed about the England position. That is that if my future is in football, it would be at club level. I would also urge the Football Association to persist, if possible, to try to persuade Terry to change his mind and not to lose the invaluable experience gained over the last two years."

Hoddle's contract at Stamford Bridge runs out at the end of the season, which would coincide with Venables' stepping down after the European Championship final in June. He has not signed a new deal but he discounted any chance of his becoming England coach.

"I haven't even thought about it," he said. "I don't wish to look and plan too far ahead. I have got enough problems of my own as a club manager." He, too, spoke of the need for continuity in the England camp.

William Hill offer odds of 8-1 about Venables doing a U-turn and remaining in charge for the opening World Cup qualifying tie next September. Puzzled punters, meanwhile, have flocked on to Howard Wilkinson and Frank Clark as likely contenders.

Hill's have cut Wilkinson's rating from 8-1 to 5-2 joint second favourite, while Clark - his Nottingham Forest side are England's only European survivors - has come in from 33-1 to 20-1.

Wilkinson who is under contract at Leeds until the summer of 1997, refused to discuss his chances of landing the post. He said: "I have nothing to say about the job - and that includes questions on whether I want it or don't want it - or the qualities required to do the job, the possible candidates or any other aspects of this particular issue."

The Middlesbrough manager, Robson, despite his claims, is the 7-4 favourite for the post, with the former Switzerland manager, Roy Hodgson, now in

charge at Internazionale, 12-1.

A spokesman for William Hill, Graham Sharpe, said: "We are very sceptical about high profile managers who make diplomatic statements stressing how happy they are with their current jobs. We believe most managers are so confident of their own abilities they would find it almost impossible to turn down running the national side if offered it directly."

Candidates fill the 'No' lobby

Guy Hodgson
considers the FA's options in finding a national coach

tional but the perfect man appears to be an impossible dream.

If the denials are taken at face value the only Premiership managers who would meet the criteria are Brian Little, Colin Todd and Alan Ball and none has had sufficient success at club level to merit proper attention. The FA will have to compromise or change someone's mind.

Of the latter category, Robson would seem the most amenable, given that his "no" was the least emphatic. A man whose patriotism was as fierce as his tackles might leave the Riverside if he was persuaded his country was in a desperate position.

If the FA did bend, Howard Wilkinson would appear a natural candidate. He never played for England but his esteem at Lancaster Gate is high and he has something on his cv that, among current English managers, only Howard Kendall can match: winning the championship. He has also ruled himself out.

A final compromise may yet prove the most attractive, however. One man will become available in 1997 who has played for England and had international management experience. The FA could ask Robson or Keegan to carry the burden on a part-time and temporary basis and wait for the candidate they most crave for the job. Then Terry Venables would become the most successful survivor of them all.

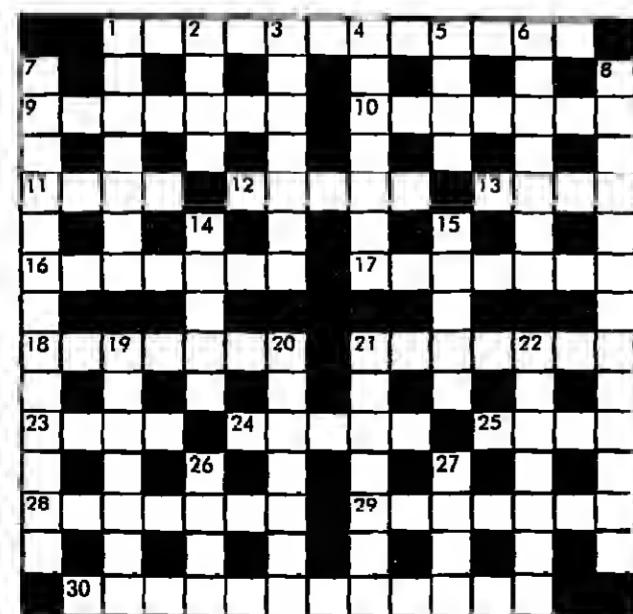
Who can blame them? It takes a soul of granite consistency not to flinch when confronted with "turnip" headlines and even those with the necessary iron would probably prefer not to have their private lives investigated with the toothcomb intensity that the tabloids apply. The England job has become the most difficult of them all.

So where does the the growing list of renegades leave the Football Association? Graham Kelly, the governing body's chief executive, says the preference is for an English former interna-

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 2882. Saturday 13 January

By Phi



Friday's solution

Last Saturday's solution

GASKET **MINCER** **PIE** **RACE** **GOER** **ACCE** **OE**
PP **GHT** **N** **AG** **E** **OL** **TO** **A** **X**
TEES **HIBIS** **BISSES** **SIR** **STRAIGHTFORWARD**
AC **CO** **S** **I** **D** **E** **F** **O**
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RA **F** **D** **H** **S** **I** **G** **O** **O** **S** **E**
MANIA **ELECTRODE** **DILAPIDATE** **PENSIONER**
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HEARTLINE **TRUSTY** **EGEE** **EENE** **K**
DI **FAIRLY** **BRIGADES**

The first five correct solutions to this week's puzzle opened new Thurlow's handbacked copies of the excellent Chambers Biographical Dictionary, worth £25. Answers and winners' names will be published next Saturday. Send solutions to Saturday Crossword, B.O. Box 4018, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HL. Please use a separate envelope and postage. Last week's winners: Mr R. S. Smith, Mrs A. D. Morris, Mrs S. S. S. Morris, Mr R. J. G. Morris, North Herts, C. Glover, London EC2V 8EP; Mr G. M. Middlemiss, Last week's winners: 24 March, Tiverton, Devon; K.R. Milner, Malvern; Mr L.W. Birt, Romsey, Hampshire; G.D. Watt, Worley; Peter Jenner, Reading.

ACROSS

- 1 Military supporter affected to flourish, circling round (7)
- 2 Source of energy that's about thespian (7)
- 3 Male often in hot spot shows anger over male in cool (7)
- 4 Inclination not to start the dusting? (7)
- 5 Farm produce from layers? Not chickens, principally (4)
- 6 Working legs in hard race (7)
- 7 Initially how one plays Monopoly... (4,3,4,2)
- 8 ... while at Greenwich? (2,3,8)
- 14 Boards the coach (5)
- 15 Name dropping in affection, displaying offensiveness (5)
- 19 Go on for longer than a route snaking around West (7)
- 20 One guy upset. Right, being less experienced? (7)
- 21 What's the point of a story about a yard belonging to the council leader? (7)
- 22 Some swimmers evidently do so (7)
- 26 Stroke from the whip appears endless, unfortunately (4)
- 27 Continent has a former name of a local country curtailed (4)

DOWN

- 1 Church took in gold from castle (7)
- 2 End of game fellow? (4)
- 3 Male often in hot spot shows anger over male in cool (7)
- 4 Inclination not to start the dusting? (7)
- 5 Farm produce from layers? Not chickens, principally (4)
- 6 Working legs in hard race (7)
- 7 Initially how one plays Monopoly... (4,3,4,2)
- 8 ... while at Greenwich? (2,3,8)
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The most famous umpire in the world: The inimitable Dickie Bird relaxes on holiday in Torquay yesterday. He retires from Test cricket at Lord's this summer